The Potential Role of Spirituality in Conducting Field Research: Examination of a Model and a Process

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Abstract

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Keywords

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Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine if a model and a process that I developed could be applied to the experiences of participants in a field research program in Cuba. The model, the *Cognitive-Experiential Tri-Circle*, is an attempt to describe the relationship between beliefs and experience for field researchers. The process involved reflection on the relationship between these for field researchers. It was a set of activities involving writing and small group discussion. My purpose in this article is not only to examine this particular study, but also to raise questions about the potential role of spirituality in the conduct of research.

The body of the article is divided into five parts. The first is a description of the program in which participants were enrolled and a description of my own method of interviews with participants. The second is a description of the model. A description of the process follows. The fourth section is a report of data from participants that deal with spirituality. The final section is a discussion of the study in the context of debate among theorists of qualitative research.

Description

A number of factors involved in this study need to be described here. I conducted this study based on a program that was rich in the potential to connect beliefs and/or spirituality to field research.

My role in the School of Education at Loyola does bear some weight on this study. I am the chaplain to the School of Education. As such, my duties include things spiritual. However, I also am a part-time instructor in the School of Education, teaching mostly qualitative research methodology. With the program in Cuba, I would have to say that these roles are blended at times. I grade assignments but also facilitate reflection. Some participants earned graduate credit through the program. These students took a class in qualitative research methods and wrote field papers based on their observations. All participants in the program were required to participate in "reflection" exercises. Participants also did service at one site by either teaching English classes or giving cultural presentations on the United States to an "English Club" at one institution.

Reflection consisted of some writing exercises based on worksheets followed by small group discussion. The reflection process is described later in this article. In addition to the worksheet process, I also began each reflection session with a short reading from a religious tradition (a "prayer"), such as statements from Martin Luther King or Oscar Romero or a passage from the Bible. Most often, a participant read the passage, but sometimes I did.

The sites that we visited in this program are sponsored by religious organizations. Students do visit government-sponsored museums and public plazas, but the majority of time is spent in religiously sponsored institutions. These include a synagogue that provides kosher meals to its congregation, a synagogue that operates a youth center, a Presbyterian counseling center, a Catholic nursing home, and a number of Catholic institutions that provide education in English, computers, the social sciences, and theology or pastoral studies. The majority of sites operate libraries. The religious nature of these sites varies in how overtly it is displayed. While theology classes show a strong concern for a particular religious point of view, computer classes and counseling sessions operate in much the same way as they might in a secular institution. For some sites, teaching the religion is an important goal while for others the sponsors live out their religious convictions by providing services to the poor. The staff at these institutions varies greatly in their own religious convictions, as do the students or clients who patronize these institutions.

Participants in the program included graduate students enrolled in the course, graduate students at Loyola who did not enroll in the course, faculty, and persons from outside the university who wished to participate in the program. Participants made one of four trips: a two-week student trip in May 1999; a one-week School of Educator faculty trip in May 1999; a ten-day student trip in May 2000; a two-week student and interested persons trip in August 2000. Participants ranged in their affiliation with any religious institutions. Some identified as Jewish, some did not identify with any religion, and most identified as Christian. It is safe to say that none were motivated by religious interest in choosing to do the program. One of the most frequently asked questions by applicants was, "I'm not really very religious. How religious is this program?" Most seemed

motivated by an interest to experience a culture usually restricted to U.S. citizens. Some also were motivated by social concerns (visiting a developing country) or political concerns (sympathy for socialist government).

I interviewed twenty participants for this study. Three were faculty. Thirteen were graduate students, ten of whom were enrolled in the course. Four were persons from outside the university. The amount of time between when they did the program and when I interviewed them ranged greatly. In a few cases, it was over a year that had elapsed. In the cases of several participants in the August 2000, program, I interviewed them on the last day in Cuba or while waiting in airports in Havana or Toronto. I have focused in this report on five participants. I have used pseudonyms for all participants. "Anne" was a graduate student enrolled in the course for the May 1999 trip. "Tim" was a graduate student enrolled the course in the August 2000 trip. "Ernest" was a graduate student enrolled in the course in the August 2000 trip. "Sandra" was a faculty member on the May 1999 trip. "Penny" was a graduate student enrolled in the course on the May 2000 trip.

Another factor, which influenced this study a great deal, is the ever-changing scene in Cuba. The economy of Havana has improved in the last few years, and participants who went on trips more recently tended to see life in Cuba as not as difficult as those who went on earlier trips. Also, the Cuban government has fluctuated in its stance toward certain religious institutions. At times, some of the centers we visited felt very uncomfortable with having visitors form the United States. At other times, they felt free to have participants visit and discuss topics openly with our participants. At times, the Cuban government was very concerned about Cubans talking with outsiders, and at other times, Cubans felt free to socialize with our participants. These variables greatly influenced participants' impressions of life in Cuba.

Model

One focus of this study is a model, which I have developed, the *Cognitive-Experiential Tri-Circle*. The basic assumption of the model is that for the individual ("self") depth of experience and depth of beliefs are equally related. In other words, if an individual goes very in-depth into an experience, s/he will be forced to examine his/her own beliefs (including spirituality) at a deeper level and become more integrated with his/her beliefs. Also, if an individual spends time examining his/her beliefs (including spirituality) at a deeper level and becomes more integrated with those beliefs, s/he will then go more in depth into an experience (such as visiting Cuba).
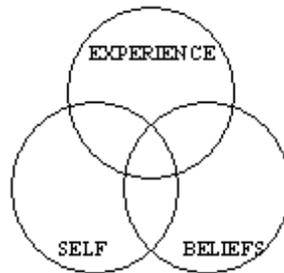
The implications of the model for research deal with depth of experience in the field. In the case of a very successful field research experience, the circles are pulled together tightly. In the case of an unsuccessful field research experience, the circles only touch at the surface; the individual has only gone into an experience at a surface level and has only become more in tune with his/her beliefs at a surface level. It is important to understand that the model assumes that the relationship between each circle is direct and equal. All three circles will always be equidistant from each other, whether close or distant. In other words, in order for a researcher to have depth of experience at a research site, the research must have depth of awareness of his or her own beliefs.

It is important to emphasize that this is meant as a practical model rather than a philosophical model. Epistemologists can argue if any experience can exist outside the self. It also may be questionable if beliefs can exist outside the self. What is clear is that participants "discovered" beliefs through reflection and experience according to their own testimonies. It is also clear that participants saw levels of depth in their experiences in Cuba. The model serves to explain a relationship in the practice of field research. It is not intended to explain the epistemological or ontological questions involved in the research paradigm debate.
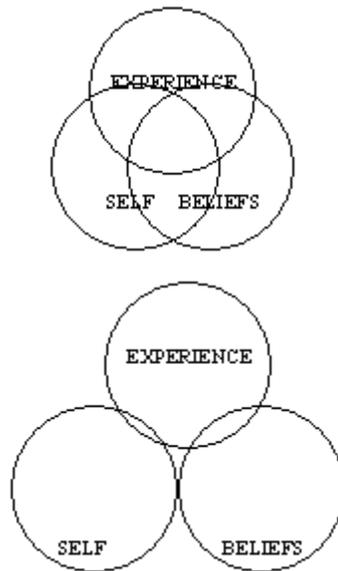
Participant Reactions to the Model

I asked participants what they thought of the model. I did this at the end of my interviews in order to avoid leading responses to earlier questions (see Catalogue of Subjects). Participants felt that the model "made sense" and explained their experiences as researchers in this program. Several had very strong positive reactions to the model and believed that it was an excellent tool for describing this type of research. What follows are participant responses which demonstrate various aspects of the model.

Beliefs and Experience

Many participants saw their beliefs developed through conflict with an experience or confirmed through immersion in an experience. Sandra's narrative shows a strong connection between *self*, *beliefs*, and *experience*: "I find, whenever I go anywhere, particularly when the culture is very different from mine, I learn more about myself from my reactions to the other culture. For me, what it does is, 'Wow, this is important.
You need to think about this. Why are you processing this in this way? Why is this bothering you so much?' I think in a new culture, you don't let yourself, you can only do so much at a time. For me, I think it was the fifth day, and it was hot and sticky, and there were just some inconveniences that came up, and I had just had it. It's that old culture shock feeling. I think that that's maybe the first time that you're getting this interaction between your experiences and your beliefs. And you get through it, and that experience becomes an integrated part of 'self.' As you become a therapist, at first you feel like you're role playing, and at first when we were teaching at the mission, I felt like I was role playing, like I was a phony, like I was trying to do something. But over time that does become integrated into 'self' and does impact your beliefs system so that it goes together and informs each other."

Experience changing beliefs was a very common theme in the interviews. In fact, participants often saw their beliefs as a product of their experiences. Tim stated, "For me, I usually have an experience and then kind of try to pull back and look at it objectively, and look at the experience within my belief system. Usually, it either fits or it doesn't, and if it doesn't, I have to change something about my belief system."

Discovering Self and Beliefs

Most of the participants stated that they did not discover new beliefs through the experience of being in Cuba, but rather that reflection and the experience allowed them to articulate their beliefs more clearly than they had done in the past. For some, however, they discovered new insights about themselves and their beliefs. The four excerpts that follow describe that self-discovery.

Anne shared, "I have difficulty accepting the fact that I am powerless in some situations. I learned that I am perhaps a more compassionate person than I thought I was, because some of the ways that I reacted on coming back were completely unexpected, and I would not have predicted that I would have reacted that way. And I learned that I have an awful lot more to learn about relating to people, not just through language, but identifying or not with their life experiences. I learned that I need to learn a whole lot more about not just the culture of Cuba, but it opened my eyes to the fact that I need to be more open just to a whole lot of things that are foreign to me."

From Penny, "It just reinforced for me just how lucky I am to have grown up in this culture and to have all the advantages we have in this country, and the freedom we have in this country. I think freedom is something you don't appreciate until you get out of this country and realize that other people don't have as much freedom as we have."

Tim stated, "It didn't really bring out new values, but I guess it brought out why I had them. I realized that my value system is sort of a collection of what I picked up from other people. Because in writing this stuff down, I could kind of think of who told me this kind of thing, like a teacher making this kind of statement, or my mother making this kind of statement. I sort of realized that my unique value system is just kind of the unique collection of what I've received from other sources…A lot of people are sort of socialists for the world and capitalists for themselves. Everybody wants to have people have their basic needs met, but when it comes to themselves and/or their families and people close to them, they want the best and are willing to go to great lengths to get them. If I learned something about myself, I realized how reward-driven I am. And here, I wonder how driven I would be to achieve things in the absence of the reward. It made me wonder how intrinsic or extrinsic my goal-setting is."

Sandra came to some self-discovery through a strong reaction she had. "I've been in a lot of different places, and I've had a lot of different experiences, some of them in Third World Countries. I think what was different for me, or what I had to process, was the prostitution and how angry I felt. That one night there were two European men who brought in two young women into the hotel lounge. They were there at the bar having a drink and feeling the girls up, and I wanted to get up and go hit those men. And I was surprised at my reaction; it was just so intense. I know about that. I was in Amsterdam. I've been to Hong Kong. But it just made me feel very awful in Cuba because I guess I felt that there was a desperation about it, knowing how poor everyone is. That really bothered me, and it surprised me the intensity of reaction I was having."

Importance of Knowing Beliefs

Participants generally agreed that it was important to take time to reflect through exercises in order to realize or articulate beliefs and values. Anne stated, "Identifying values is important, and being able to pick them out and recognize them is important. I think a lot of what we do, or a lot of what I do, I'm not thinking consciously of what that value is at the moment that I'm doing something or saying something or behaving in a certain way. But I hope that it's behind what I'm doing as a motivating factor." Ernest shared, "They were things that I'm conscious of, but I'm not always conscious of and aware. There are times when I engage in a behavior or an activity and I don't always realize that I'm operating under that value system. But at some point in my life, or at different moments, I've sort of thought about them, and I realize and I'm aware of them."

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Process

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The reflection process that I used is one I developed myself. The method I used in group processing/reflection was an adaptation of tools developed by Michael Grady (1998) and his associates at Saint Louis University. Grady's purpose has been teaching qualitative data collection. The major feature of Grady's methodology has been to have the field research begin with values as the foundation of forming questions to be answered in the field.

In the process, I used a series of worksheets. Participants first would write for about fifteen minutes and then share in small groups. The first worksheet instructed them

to write down questions they had about the communities that they were about to enter. I told them that they could add, delete, or modify questions as they went through the experience. A few days later, I gave them a second worksheet. On this worksheet, they were asked to identify the values that they hold which underlie the questions they asked. An example was provided for them. I instructed them, "The questions we ask about a place or a people tell us something about *ourselves*. They tell us what's important to *us*. I want you to look at the questions you wrote down, and ask yourself, 'What are my values that underlie these questions? Why did I ask about *that?*' and put it down in the matrix on this worksheet." After a few more days, they were given a third worksheet. This asked them to identify the "sources" of the values they identified. These could be religious beliefs, social beliefs, or sources such as family or education. In a similar matrix, they were asked to write down the values they identified and then to identify "sources" of those values. Examples were provided on the worksheet. Again, they were given the option of adding, deleting, or modifying their questions. The purpose of this activity was to help the participants make direct connections between their own belief systems and their experiences at sites.

Participant Reactions

Participants generally liked the process. They described it as "helpful" and "logical." Penny told me, "It helped me to really examine my values and my cultural values and understand that I was seeing a lot of things through my own culture and realize that I needed to understand Cuban culture better to have a better perspective on it." Ernest shared, "I thought the processing was helpful because the end result for me was sort of a reaffirmation of who I am based on the vales and beliefs I subscribe to." Only two faculty participants had trouble with the process. Sandra shared, "I had some trouble with it. It wasn't really conceptually how I think, so I felt like I was forcing my thoughts into a format which didn't really help me reflect. I think what works for me better is to talk about a particular experience I've had and then go from the particular experience into values and impressions." A few remarked that they could have used some more practice with the process. Some suggested forming some questions together as a group before forming individual questions. One suggested presenting the model first to help the group understand the process. On one trip, I had a larger number of participants that I broke into small groups. I decided to keep the same small groups for the duration of the trip. Most participants from this trip suggested rotating groups in order to get a broader range of perspectives.

Some participants told me that taking time to reflect was something missing in their lives both personally and as researchers. Anne had this to share, "This is not something I think about all the time. So the cumbersome part for me was getting everything else out of my mind and being able to strip away from a behavior or an attitude the superfluous stuff to be able to see what was at the core of that. That, for me, takes time. It's not something for me that I can instantaneously identify what the value is or what the underlying belief is. For me, that is more of a reflective process than an academic one. Because of the way my life is and the way my work is, I don't have a whole lot of time to think and reflect, or I don't take the time to think and reflect as I should or as I wish I did. Any time I do take that time, or am required to take that time, it

always turns out to be a valuable experience for me. Sometimes in class, there will be a discussion, and somebody will immediately know what he or she thinks about something, like the Elian situation. I haven't had time to think about that. There were things when I got there, I would ask, 'Now, what is it about me that I have this value?' And to go back and search for what those beliefs were, that is something that I don't always have in the forefront of my mind. But I'd like to think there's something behind them, and obviously there must be. But can I always say to you, 'This is why I believe this'? Golly, probably not always…. I always feel, for myself, that the writing process is a learning process. Anything I write is going to tell me something not only about what I learned, but about myself as well."

Comfort with the Process

I asked participants if they were comfortable sharing with others their beliefs and values or the process was uncomfortable or strange for them. Most felt very comfortable with the process. Many felt that their studies at Loyola had prepared them for this because discussing values and beliefs was a common practice in graduate classes. Not all agreed with this.

Anne was not completely comfortable with the process initially. "I like group discussions, I think, when I feel like I know members of the group better or when I feel that they know me better. I didn't really feel that my small group was necessarily on the same page that I was as far as values were concerned. Not that anyone's were higher or lower or better or worse. It was just that at that time, I felt it was the first glimpse these people were getting to what my values were, and I don't know how comfortable I felt doing that with those people."

From Penny, "It did seem strange to be discussing spirituality because you don't do that in most courses. You don't discuss values and beliefs at all. You don't talk about religion usually. Even though this is a Catholic institution, there pretty much is separation of church and state in our classes, in our graduate classes. So this was a whole new class experience for me. I wasn't comfortable at first. I really was nervous about it at first, because I really don't think about my religion that much. I'm not that religious at all. Certainly it's been a long time since I was in Sunday school or Hebrew school. It's been a long time since my kids were in Hebrew school. Other than when I go to synagogue and listen to a sermon, which isn't often, I just don't think about it. So, I was worried about that. I was worried about the fact that I'm Jewish, and this is a Catholic school, and you are a Catholic chaplain. I was wondering if we were going to say prayers that were really oriented toward the Catholic religion. So I didn't know what to expect before we went on the trip. But actually, it was a very good thing for me to think about. At first, I was worried about the prayers. I was worried about the content. But they were really not; I just maybe remember one that had anything to do with the Christian religion. Actually, they were very thought provoking. They were really good. So, I became a lot more comfortable really quickly."

Ernest stated, "It was different, but not strange. Because I know you, you're with the campus ministry and that's your thing, and so it's not out of the ordinary."

Sandra shared, "When one faculty member did not want to read a prayer out loud for the group, that really did make me reflect on what I'm doing, because quite honestly,

I'm not what you would describe as a particularly religious or spiritual person. I hadn't thought of myself that way. So what it did was it made me think about what did I believe about prayer and what did I believe about public expressions of prayer. I guess what I kind of concluded was that it was important. Prayer for me, it was another way of communicating desires, feelings, and concerns in an experience that's shared. And whatever that does then, whether I believe there's a God up there that hears that, that what it does is it helps us connect with a different part of ourselves. It helps me connect with a less logical part of myself."

Group Sharing

        I asked participants if the activity of sharing in small group was helpful to them in their role as researchers. All agreed that this was important. Penny stated, "It was helpful that we shared with other people to get their perspective and their ideas. Two heads are better than one. And it was also interesting to see how our perspectives could be so different. Even though we were all raised in the same culture, we still, a lot of times, had really different perspectives." From Ernest, "Doing it in small groups was helpful in that we learned from each other. I mean, there were some differences in how we experienced things here in Cuba and the sites, and there are differences in our value systems as well. Even outside of the group process you also do some self-reflection." Sandra also found it helpful; "Part of what happens when you're in a new culture is, I've seen it through my lens, my experiential lens, and it's really good to hear it from somebody else who may see it in a different way."

Process Affecting Observation

        One of my major concerns was if the processing was helpful to the observation aspect of conducting research. Most participants found the process helpful in analyzing data more so than in collecting data. Some did find it helpful in the data collection, however. Penny told me, "It made me start separating; 'What am I seeing through my culture?' And try to clear some of that away and try to look at what else was there that I was missing. When we were processing, it would create more questions in my head. The next time I would go out, I would look for more things, and I would see more each time. The more we processed, I would think about more details and look for other things I had missed." Ernest had a similar reaction; "They were questions that I continued to think about and that I continued to dialogue with, even outside the group. I think it sort of stayed in my mind."

Process Affecting Service

        Because service was an aspect of this program, I was concerned with how the process affected how participants did service. The majority told me that they saw no effect. Penny did share, "I had a better perspective on what parts of our culture they had been exposed to and what parts they hadn't, and what they understood, and what they didn't." Sandra had a similar reaction; "Maybe in the sense of understanding where these

folks are coming from. I think it's very hard for me to understand what it would be like to live in Cuba. By sharing, we all talked about what people said."

Ernest came with an interesting perspective on service; "I think the way I look at that is more of a long term, and I see my life in sort of a long term perspective, that this is what I want to do based on those values that I have. And so I think, and maybe this is just me, but I don't put a lot of value on those small, in-the-moment kind of situations. And I think part of it just, and perhaps this is just, this is wrong, but it's like kids coming up to me and asking for a pencil or a dollar, and I can't give to every kid. And even women who come up to me and ask, and beg, the way I sort of think about that and feel *better*, because it's a situation where you have a, how would you say, it's a moral dilemma almost. But the way I deal with that is I remind myself that what I'm doing with my life, that everything I'm doing with my life, that everything I'm doing is related to the ultimate goal. So I think what's happening is I don't put a lot of value into those situations. Those things to me, it's like on-the-surface kind of things, and to me what's more important is getting down to the deeper underlying issues that are more significant saw trying to resolve the larger more global social issue or problem."

Spirituality

The unique feature of this study is the aspect of spirituality in research. The participants were split on if the program touched on issues of spirituality for them. For some, such as Penny, the trip did touch on spiritual issues; "The whole trip for me kind of stirred up things about religion or kind of how I view religion, or what values were important, and just the commonalties between my religion and a lot of the Christian sites we were visiting."

I found that how the program affected participants spiritually depended a great deal on how the participant defined spirituality. For some participants, "Spirituality" denoted a very private set of beliefs and experiences, which related them to something abstract and separate from daily life. For these participants, the program was not likely to touch on spiritual issues. For those who had a broader definition of spirituality or for whom spirituality was tied to daily life, the program did touch on spiritual issues. For example, Anne defined spirituality very broadly; "If it's going to help me grow as a person, which is one of my main goals in life, then yes, I would see it as spiritual." Ernest saw his spirituality as being very closely tied to the human world and to his research in Cuba; "I think that's because of how I view things. My values and beliefs are always to some extent tied to my spiritual or religious beliefs. So they're not separate entities… A lot of it revolved around the theme of race, culture, ethnicity, privilege, and social justice. I see all those things as very related. So, a lot of what I wrote, those questions, were around those themes, those issues. They're all related to my spirituality in terms of respect, doing good to others, things like that. Sort of the Golden Rule."

Appropriateness of Spirituality in Research

In addition to asking participants if they felt that the program had touched on spiritual issues, I also asked them if they felt it was appropriate to include spirituality in conducting research. Answers varied greatly on this question. Some saw a positive value

in including this in the conduct of research. Most felt that it was conditional; "it depends on what you're researching," was a very common response. For these, considering spirituality was appropriate when researching sites that had spiritual elements. They saw it as appropriate in this program because the sites they were researching were religiously sponsored. Many felt it was appropriate to consider spirituality and beliefs in order to remove any bias this could cause in the researcher.

Anne had a broad definition of spirituality which allowed her to see it as positive in conducting any social research; "My gosh, I don't see how you could do it without including beliefs and spirituality. If you're dealing with people, it's all based on beliefs and values. It's always underlying. I don't see how you could do it without touching that aspect. I never think it's inappropriate to include spirituality. I think any time you're doing field research that has to do with human beings, I think there's a great value in bringing in beliefs and spirituality into it because I don't believe that you can separate a person or the field that you are researching from their underlying beliefs and values or the researcher's underlying beliefs and values."

Sandra saw an increasing role of spirituality in research; "I think if you had asked me that ten years ago, I think I still would have said, 'Yes, but I don't know how we do that.' I see a change, partly just from being at Loyola, plus just the whole literature scene going that way."

Penny's response, "I think it's really important before you do research to see if your beliefs have interfered with the results," was very typical. It is similar to Earnest's response; "It's like counter-transference. It's the same kind of thing. The more you're aware of your own issues, your values, your beliefs that might affect your work, whether it's counseling therapy or research, I think the better in that you can sort of try to avoid perhaps contamination. Although, it doesn't necessarily exist, value*less* research or valueless therapy. There's always some value there. But I think that it helps to be aware of how that might affect it and in what way, to what extent is it affecting your work."

Tim demonstrated that one's definition of "spirituality" greatly affected how he saw it playing into research. "'Spiritual' in the sense of it's sort of humbling, but I didn't really have a kind of awakening. But I think I can leave here being more content with what I have, and not feel that the poor life of a college students is as much of a struggle as what I thought it was before, considering how other people live. So, in that sense, it's spiritual, in that Oprah kind of way…. It depends on how you define spirituality. If you look at spirituality as this essence of being, interconnectedness of everything, an energy, what makes us all one, then a person would probably try to understand a culture within the context of that culture. Spirituality in terms of how I connect with a higher power or a source would affect research in the sense of it would make me more aware of my world and how I process things. I think it's important to consider beliefs, sort of what colors how you're interpreting what you're feeling and all those sorts of things."

Discussion

One potential response to my study could be, "So what." It is not an unreasonable response. I created a model. I designed a program that touched on all aspects of the model. I designed a process to direct participants to act within the model. Can it be any surprise that the participants found that the model worked for them? I need to clarify that

it was not my intention to *prove* that the model explains how field research is conducted all the time in every case. I also should state that I did not create the model from my own musings. It is obviously influenced by my own beliefs; as a university chaplain, I believe that values, beliefs, and spirituality are important. The model, however, is one I created to explain what I have observed through both teaching qualitative research and through conducting cultural immersions with college students and faculty.

Most importantly, I wish to raise some questions about how social research is conducted and could be conducted. As a university chaplain, I would say that this is seen as somewhat out of my realm by many researchers and faculty. I have found that my role is valued by most of the faculty at Loyola and at other institutions where I have worked. My role tends to be seen as beneficial primarily in two areas, comfort and ethics. I find that faculty and staff tend to turn to me when there is some crisis in the life of a member of our community or when there needs to be some discussion of ethics in counseling, teaching, or research. When I am asked to contribute in the academic sector by teaching classes or sitting on dissertation committees, I believe that this is seen as part of another role for me, not as part of my role as chaplain. At a Catholic university, does the chaplain have a role in the academic functions of the university? I think this is another way of asking; at a Catholic university does spirituality have a role in research?

From this perspective, I wish to pose a few questions specifically regarding how social research is conducted. Does it make any difference if a researcher has in his or her many paradigms of "human" paradigms such as "created in the image and likeness of God," or "a soul on a journey to enlightenment through many lifetimes," or "endowed by the Creator with certain inalienable rights"? Could these paradigms possibly affect how the researcher conducts research? Could these paradigms possibly *not* affect the conduct of research? Wouldn't the absence of these paradigms also affect the conduct of research? Can a researcher move close enough to his or her subjects to understand them without believing somehow in what they are about? Can a researcher become close enough to his or her subjects without either agreeing or disagreeing with their views and actions? Can a researcher be committed to what he or she is researching without *believing* in it?

Paradigms as Beliefs

Since the time of the Enlightenment, the social sciences have been wary of religion. "The organization of a scientific knowledge that took place during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries supposed a change in the fundamental postulate of medieval societies: the religious or metaphysical aim of stating the truth of being according to God's will was replaced by the ethical task of creating or making history (faire l'histoire). However, both ambitions were concerned ultimately with establishing order" (de Certeau, 1983, p. 125). Hirschman (1983) also writes of the social sciences' history as concerned with freedom from religious views of society; "Modern social science arose to a considerable extent in the process of emancipating itself from traditional moral teachings" (p. 21).

It is evident, however, that the social sciences could not completely free themselves from religious views. Rorty (1983) argues that Kant was "updating" Christianity in the Categorical Imperative and trying to make it *look* scientific. Meehan (1969) argues that while Hume's distinction between fact and value has made the two

inseparable in social science, both require empirical and logical processes, and neither are claims on reality.

In the social sciences, there has been great debate and dialogue about the appropriate paradigm for research. What does not seem to be of debate is the idea that social scientists operate with paradigms of conducting research. Has the word *paradigm* simply replaced the word *belief*? They do seem to be very similar. Guba asserts that Kuhn had twenty-one definitions for "paradigm" (Guba, 1990; Masterman, 1970). He also argues that the qualitative paradigm is based on Relativism. His own definition of paradigm is "a basic set of beliefs that guides action" (p. 17). Definitions from other qualitative practitioners are very similar. "A paradigm is a loose collection of logically held together assumptions, concepts, or propositions that orient thinking and research" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 33). "A paradigm is a worldview, a general perspective, a way of breaking down the complexity of the real world" (Patton, 1990, p. 37). More to my point, Peshkin (1990) regards a paradigm as "matter of faith" and "what you have left when you can't explain anymore" (p. 348). It seems clear to me that at least within the qualitative realm, social scientists acknowledge that their beliefs play a role in shaping how they conduct research.

The examples I have just given deal with paradigms of *research*. What about paradigms of *human*? "Every social scientist presupposes a definition of what is human, an idea that serves to focus and distinguish the concerns of the social scientist from those of the logician, the physicist, or the biologist…We need a definition of what is human to study humans, but we have no grounds for distinguishing an acceptable definition from an unacceptable one, since the definition is itself the only common ground we have" (Salkever, 1983, p.195). What are the consequences of the paradigms of human that social scientists hold? Salkever goes on to argue that those in current use leave some inadequacies; "The images of man which inform both empiricist and contextualist social science bar us from making, as social scientists, any judgments concerning the relative rationality or virtue of the societies or people we seek to understand" (1983, p. 197). Likewise, Rabinow (1983) argues that the cultural relativism in the tradition of Boas has resulted in Nihilism in American anthropology. "It has frequently been pointed out that the numerous attempts to treat man as an object or thing are potentially dangerous, dehumanizing, and insidious….attempts to construct a science of culture have also led-despite their intent-to a form of nihilism" (p. 52). My intent here is not to say that paradigms of *human* currently in use in the social sciences are inadequate. My intent rather is to acknowledge that they exist, that they are employed, and that they have effect. I further argue that paradigms of *human* informed through spiritualities are not inherently inclined to be less adequate than paradigms already in common use.

Objectivity in Research

One of the mantras my students in qualitative methodology classes hear from me is, "There is NO objectivity." It is a hard one for them to swallow. In fact, in this study, many of the participants believed that reflecting on their beliefs was good *because* it allowed them to remove bias, implying that objectivity was their goal. While it is hard for students to accept, the rejection of objectivity is certainly in the qualitative realm. "All researchers take sides, or are partisans for one point of view or another. Value-free

interpretive research is impossible. This is the case because every researcher brings preconceptions and interpretations to the problem being studied" (Denzin, 1989, p. 23). "Perhaps it would be best to admit that in the social sciences, inquiry always has an ethical aim" (Bellah, 1983, p. 361). "Reflectivity involves the recognition that an account of reality does not simply mirror reality but rather creates or constitutes as real in the first place whatever it describes" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 213).

  Peshkin holds the view of the impossibility of objectivity as well; "Whatever the substance of ones' persuasions at a given point, one's subjectivity is like a garment that cannot be removed" (1988, p. 17). He goes as far as even acknowledging the potential benefit of subjectivity; "Subjectivity can be seen as virtuous, for it is the basis of researchers' making a distinctive contribution, one that results from the unique configuration of their personal qualities joined to the data they have collected" (p. 18). He recounts reflecting on his own subjectivity in the course of a study he was conducting. He argues that discovering subjectivity allows for *managing* it, but not for eliminating it.

  Certain qualitative approaches acknowledge and even value the subjectivity of the researcher. In connoisseur evaluation, the researcher uses his or her own values about what constitutes excellence (Eisner, 1985; Patton, 1990). Heuristics requires the researcher to have personal contact with the phenomenon under study (Douglas & Moustakas, 1984; Patton, 1990). And hermeneutics acknowledges that interpretation must take place from a perspective (Kneller 1984; Patton, 1990).

  Patton has even created a category for qualitative methods that openly begin from a particular subjectivity; "Orientational qualitative inquiry begins with an explicit theoretical or ideological perspective that determines what variables and concepts are most important and how the findings will be interpreted" (1990, p. 86). He cautions that the researcher must make the orientation explicit. One orientation he discusses is Feminism. In deed, feminist researchers clearly acknowledge that subjectivity plays a strong role in research. One of the strongest voices in feminist social science, Gilligan, writes, "I have begun with the voices of women as they articulate a morality of care because both these voices and this ethic have been missing from our theories of moral development. In their absence, a morality of justice prevails in the psychological and educational domain" (1983, p. 34). Rosaldo writes, "Our questions are inevitably bound up with our politics. The character, constraint, and promise of our scholarship are informed as much by moral ends and choices as they are by the 'objective' postures necessary to research. For feminists, especially, intellectual insight thrives in a complex relation with contemporary moral and political demands" (1983, p. 76).

  It may seem strange to argue both for a subjective view of research and for a view of research informed by spirituality. After all, spiritualities are usually based on ontologies that hold absolutes as the building blocks of reality. I am not arguing here for a particular paradigm of human based on a particular spirituality (which is not to say that I don't have one). While it is an old Philosophy 101 idea, it is worth repeating that every philosophy holds some absolutes. Even Relativism holds relativity as an absolute. With the inevitability of absolutes, is there room for spiritual absolutes in the business of social research?

Getting Close to Subjects

I wish to make it clear that I am not proposing this model and process with the idea that research may be good for the soul. Rather, I am proposing this model and process to examine how reflection may be good for research. A basic premise of my model is that reflection leads to greater depth of experience in the field. "The inner perspective assumes that understanding can only be achieved by actively participating in the life of the observed and gaining insight by means of introspection" (Bruyn, 1963, p. 226).

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) argue the benefits of reflection in research. "*The Reflective Part of Fieldnotes*…Because you are so central to the collection of data and it's analysis, and because neither instruments nor carefully codified procedures exist, you must be extremely self-conscious about your relationship to the setting and about the evolution of the design and analysis" (p. 121). "Like everyone else, qualitative researchers have opinions, beliefs, attitudes, and prejudices, and they try to reveal these by reflecting on their own way of thinking in the notes" (p. 123).

While Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995) also argue that reflection is beneficial; "It becomes critical for the ethnographer to document her own activity, circumstances, and emotional responses as these factors shape the process of observing and recording others' lives" (p. 11). On the other hand, they are skeptical of the type of reflection that I propose. "In promoting learning through doing, experiential education places students in community service or in internships in some institutional setting…But service learning journals encourage writing about the students' perceptions and feelings more than about what others are doing and saying. Such journals often do not encourage students to write at length or in real detail about their observations" (p. xv). "Extensive fieldnotes may require more commitment to research than is common to many experiential education students, who are often motivated-at least initially-by a desire to serve others or to assess the attractions of a particular career" (p. xvi). In response to this potential criticism, I would say that I very intentionally connected good observation with reflection in my process.

Patton (1990) writes extensively about the need for researchers to get close to their subjects based on the understandings of Max Weber. "Qualitative inquiry depends on, uses, and enhances the researcher's direct experience in the world and insights about those experiences. This includes learning from empathy….Empathy develops from the personal contact with the people interviewed and observed during fieldwork...The value of empathy is emphasized in the phenomenological doctrine of verstehen, which undergirds much qualitative inquiry" (p. 56). "Qualitative approaches emphasize the importance of getting close to the people and situations being studied in order to personally understand the realities and minutiae of daily life" (p. 46). "Qualitative evaluators question the necessity and utility of distance and detachment, assuming that without empathy and sympathetic introspection derived from personal encounters the observer cannot fully understand human behavior" (p. 47).

Marshall and Rossman express a similar view. "She (the researcher) must gain some understanding, even sympathy, for the research participants in order to gain entry into their world. The researcher's insight increases the likelihood that she will be able to

describe the complex social system being researched. However, the researcher must provide controls for bias in interpretation" (1998, p. 147).

Research theorists also argue that the field will inevitably affect the researcher. "It is central to the method of participant observation that changes will occur in the observer" (Denzin, 1978, p.200). Proponents of Grounded Theory argue that experience can enhance the quality of a researcher by contributing to his or her *theoretical sensitivity* (Glaser 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). "Theoretical sensitivity refers to the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn't" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 42).

Depth of experience in the field, or closeness to research subjects, is an essential aspect of qualitative research. Such depth requires reflection, or introspection. Such introspection must include beliefs about what it means to be human. Such beliefs about what it means to be human necessarily require an examination of metaphysical beliefs *if they are taken to their logical ends*. I readily concede that not everyone takes their beliefs about what it means to be human to their logical ends in the world of metaphysics. I know I do not have a spiritual examination every time I interview a subject, but I have had spiritual examinations that have informed my view of what it means to be human. These necessarily affect how I have conducted my research. I argue that these examinations have pulled me closer to subjects and given me more in-depth experience in the field. This depth, rather than impossible attempts at objectivity, is what has allowed me to report data, as subjects understand it. In this study, while participants agreed that their experiences caused examination of their beliefs and that examining their beliefs affected their experiences, these beliefs were not spiritual or metaphysical in every case. For those participants who were moved to examine issues of spirituality, their spiritualities already had strong ties to their beliefs about human experience.

Conclusion

The *Cognitive-Experiential Tri-Circle* is an effective model to describe the relationship between beliefs and field experience for some researchers in some research settings. A process in which researchers identify and discuss the underlying values and beliefs in their research questions is helpful for some researchers in examining the relationship between these two. For some researchers, the process helps them get closer to their researcher settings, and for some researchers, the process helps them examine their own belief systems and value systems. In some cases, these belief systems include spirituality. This seems to be more the case for researchers who already hold spiritualities that are tied to their views of *human*. In some cases, researchers find this valuable in order to avoid bias in conducting research.

The study raises questions about the appropriate place of beliefs, including spiritual beliefs, in the conduct of social research. In the qualitative schools of thought, it has long been held that a researcher's views will affect the conduct of research. Can these views be called *beliefs*? Can these beliefs include spirituality?

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Catalogue of Subjects

Name	Date of Trip	Type	Status	Interviewed
Anne	May 1999	Graduate Student	Enrolled in Class	June 29, 2000
Betty	May 2000	Graduate Student	Not Enrolled	July 26, 2000
Jorge	August 2000	Graduate Student	Enrolled in Class	August 12, 2000
Dennis	August 2000	Neighbor		August 12, 2000
Ellen	May 1999	Faculty		August 21, 2000
Tim	August 2000	Graduate Student	Enrolled in Class	August 12, 2000
Ernest	August 2000	Graduate Student	Enrolled in Class	August 12, 2000
Terri	August 2000	Graduate Student	Not Enrolled	August 12, 2000
Tammy	August 2000	Graduate Student	Enrolled in Class	August 12, 2000
Kevin	August 2000	Graduate Student	Not Enrolled	August 12, 2000

Larry	August 2000	Neighbor		August 13, 2000
Mary	August 2000	Neighbor		August 13, 2000
Nancy	May 1999	Faculty		August 15, 2000
Sid	August 2000	Graduate Student	Enrolled in Class	October 1, 2000
Rita	May 1999	Graduate Student	Enrolled in Class	September 2, 2000
Peter	May 1999	Graduate Student	Enrolled in Class	September 2, 2000
Rick	August 2000	Neighbor	<TD< 6,>	
Sandra	May 1999	Faculty		October 6, 2000
Tina	May 2000	Graduate Student	Enrolled in Class	October 8, 2000
Penny	May 2000	Graduate Student	Enrolled in Class	October 16, 2000

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