

# LOOKING BACKWARD, MOVING FORWARD: EXPANDING SOCIOLOGICAL HORIZONS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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KATHY CHARMAZ\*  
*Sonoma State University*

**ABSTRACT** *Two research stories provide a means of looking backward at our discipline over the twentieth century and of thinking about moving forward in the twenty-first. These stories recount individuals' quest for control when their moral status is threatened. Both research stories and sociological stories render reality, subscribe to rules for such renderings, contain an inner logic, and make moral claims for credibility. When looking backward at the discipline, sociologists need to build on the classical theorists, not dismiss them. At the millennium sociological theory and methods are contested; and challenges to foundational assumptions that gained momentum in the late 1960s have recently been raised anew. Moving forward in the twenty-first century means recommitting ourselves to empirical inquiry and basing our moral claims on it. I call for acknowledging the diversity of sociological approaches, agreeing on strong standards for each approach, and recognizing and examining our disciplinary moral claims.*

Look backward with me more than three decades ago at Green Pastures Rehabilitation Center. Once a county poor farm, it later became a county physical rehabilitation facility. Green Pastures lay nestled in rolling California hills five miles from the county seat. I lived there among the residents for six months in 1968 as a participant observer.

The center served about two hundred residents with physical disabilities—loosely categorized. In 1968 the average age of the residents was fifty-nine, but the modal age was seventy-three; the youngest resident was ten. The residents had the usual array of infirmities—strokes, paralyses, amputations, or diabetes, in addition to joint, chest, and nerve diseases, in all combinations. The center also served at least fifty alcoholics, numerous elders who had no place to go, and a few mental

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\*Direct all correspondence to: Kathy Charmaz, Department of Sociology, Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, CA 94928; e-mail: [charmaz@sonoma.edu](mailto:charmaz@sonoma.edu).

patients (which is what some residents, and perhaps staff, thought I was—my youth, notebook, and claims to be doing research probably convinced them). Finding a treatable disability to legitimate patients' admission to the center seldom posed problems. Their bodies had worn out from hard lives, troubled times, and grueling jobs.

Imagine my first meal in the huge patient dining room. "Stewed hearts for lunch—*again?*" complained my new companions. We washed them down with acrid coffee that smelled like mucilage and tasted like metal. The reddish brown chunks of heart proved tough going for those with a full set of teeth and impossible for those who had none. No methods textbook informed me that conducting research in the land of the old and infirm required real teeth, and strong ones at that. More lessons of the importance of teeth came later. I soon learned that meals of stewed hearts resulted from yearly budgetary constraints. A low patient census the year before meant the budget for the following year shrank. Of course, during the following year, the patient census swelled to overfull. Where could dollars be saved in an already understaffed institution? In the food budget.

Morality wars were waged between various professional contingents and were played out in patients' lives. Most nurses imposed behavioral standards concerning sexuality, drinking, and cleanliness, although a few winked and walked away. The physical therapists claimed the moral high ground on assessments of patient independence. They battled social workers to gain early discharge dates by raising the specter of patients' losing moral fiber and, subsequently, becoming institutionalized. Remaining at the center after reaching the therapists' notion of maximum improvement would surely result in the patients' developing all the deleterious effects of institutionalization. The head social worker said to me in disgust, "The physical therapists think only God and they know when patients should be discharged." The chief business administrator, Mr. Darby, fought with the head nurse, Miss Flora, over treatment plans, programs, and institutional policies—over everything. He even once told me, "Miss Flora won't ever change. The only way to get rid of a nurse like that is through retirement."

Mr. Darby and Miss Flora each cut a large swath through the institution, in importance and imposing presence. Each stood well over six feet; each possessed stout bodies and strong characters. Face-offs between them made spectators cringe, including the doctors. Miss Flora had never forgotten her military training and military sense of order. No one could surpass her credentials to run a custodial facility—part medical care, part detention, and part human storage. Yet Mr. Darby's dream of building community and rebuilding broken bodies and lost souls permeated the center, at least in the new wings. Mr. Darby told me that it took him a decade to persuade Miss Flora to stop coming back to the center on her Saturday nights off. Stories abounded of those days, or, rather, nights, when Miss Flora returned. She was said to hide next to the storage cabinet down the dark corridor near the backdoor, the better to nab miscreants about to sneak to the liquor store a mile down the road. Although Miss Flora's midnight visits had ceased, her attention to misbehavior had not. At Monday staff meetings she announced her weekend bottle count taken from the garbage cans. Miss Flora not only testified to the broken rules but also supported her conviction that Mr. Darby failed to run a proper institution. And so it went.

But how did it go for patients? They entered the institution in the new wing and gained renewed hope. Staff assigned each new patient to an attractive private room and sent a swarm of attentive professionals, including me, to hear his or her story. When I asked one patient what he hoped to gain from his time at the rehabilitation center, he replied instantly, "Some teeth." He presented this information as a fair bargain for putting in time; he contributed to filling a bed, and the center contributed a new set of teeth (Calkins 1970:499). Most patients, like Mrs. Helen Gedding, were admitted to the center when troubles forced a transition. They usually came from the county general hospital, although many had looped through the county jail, the psychiatric hospital, and numerous skid row hotels. At sixty-two, Helen was destitute; her divorce settlement had run out. She was about to be evicted from the bed-sitting room, as she called it, where she had lived for five years since her last divorce. A small stroke landed Helen in the county hospital, where she began her journey through the institutional maze. Images of the county poor farm, a place of no return, loomed large in Helen's mind. However, her fears abated in the comfort of her room and with the concern of kindly nursing staff. Yet Helen's respite ended abruptly after physicians prescribed her treatment program and nurses transferred her to a four-bed room. Helen observed her peers and saw myriad forms of infirmity surrounding her. Walkers and wheelchairs meant one thing to Helen, incontinence, frozen faces, and incoherent speech quite another. She felt devastated, trapped in a surreal world. I sat with Helen as she sobbed, "I'm not like those people. I'm not near so sick and crippled. How could they [the staff] think that I belong in the same place with *them*?"<sup>1</sup> So began Helen's struggles *against* anonymity and *for* personhood. She had entered the unknown and uncertain.

The center was unlike affluent retirement communities in which residents resist being categorized as patients. In these institutions, being labeled as a patient meant that the resident had lost his or her independence (Morgan 1982). Instead, the "betrayal funnel" (Goffman 1961) worked in the opposite direction at the center. Helen rightly sensed that residents categorized as treatable "patients" fared better than others. Patients qualified for rehabilitation services; they stood out among the crowd of residents. Thus, compared to other residents, rehabilitation patients experienced less anonymity, enjoyed more staff interest, and were less likely to be relegated to the oblivion of the back wards. With each lower level of care, accommodations, staff oversight, rehabilitation services, and control over one's fate declined. Old men and women on the back wards became lulled by institutional routines, if not already dulled by drugs or drink.<sup>2</sup> They shuffled anonymously through the rhythm of institutional routines and retreated out of sight. Silently. Their silence accented their anonymity. These residents lost track of time, of those around them, and, sometimes, of their pasts. Staff and fellow residents cast them off as "double failures" (Cloward and Ohlin 1960); they were long disconnected from society and now disconnected from the institution. They lacked the wherewithal to establish a connection and to realize a valued self. Staff ignored them. Other residents deemed to have "rehabilitation potential" shunned them. Still, these silent residents' presence did not go unnoted: they evoked powerful images of one's possible future self.

At Green Pastures institutional policies, patient treatment plans, rehabilitation outcomes, and patient rights were all contested territories. However, those who were most affected by decisions, the patients, had the least say about them. They

had to demonstrate their physical and mental competence to staff. Like some of the other women patients, Helen Gedding tried to maintain control by doing what she did best—establishing personal relationships. She tried to cultivate friendships with Mr. Darby and several nurses.

After leaving Green Pastures, I conducted several studies of people with chronic illnesses. Their stories recounted not only their physical losses but also moral meanings embedded in loss. Thus these tales contained judgments of right and wrong, principles of ethical conduct, dilemmas of choice and action, and assessments of relative social and subjective worth. People with chronic illnesses struggled to maintain coherence and continuity of self. If either conflicted with illness or regimen, they commonly risked their health. Sometimes they chose naively, sometimes knowingly. Men particularly jeopardized their health, and their lives, to maintain control. Why did men take more physical risks than women?

Consider this story, which recounts events thirty years after my stay at Green Pastures. Don Deitz was a sixty-one-year-old actor who walked regularly with his wife and a group of friends.

Despite having sharp chest pains during a walk, Don kept up with the group. Then he insisted on going to a friend's house as previously planned, instead of to the hospital.

[During the walk] I was white and sweating like crazy. I was in obvious pain. You didn't have to be a genius to figure out something was wrong. . . . [Later] I lay on their couch for a couple of hours while they harassed me. . . . They finally said, "You're not going to die on my couch. Get out of here." [Laughing]. . . . I was just so sick of listening to them. I was extremely uncomfortable and they're just at me and at me and at me like pitbull terrorists or something, you know, so I thought, "Okay, just to shut them up."

Then it took medical staff 13 hours to stabilize Don. He resisted succumbing to being lulled by the drugs. He wanted to stay in control. While in the midst of crisis, Don Deitz tried to remain himself: the man who could think for himself and take control. He said:

One I think it's my nature [to stay in control]. You have to agree to what you are. That's number one. Number two, I was married to a surgery supervisor for twenty-two years and there used to be some very interesting statistics. Fifty percent of the people that die in hospitals die of drug-inducement. Now how many of those would have died anyhow? Nobody knows. . . . But there's a fair chance that if you go in the hospital, they'll kill you. I don't like doctors.

Don retold the tale that clinched his view.

[Bill, an old friend who had had recent brain surgery, drove up to see Don who was still in intensive care. Bill's eyes rolled back, and then he collapsed. Don jumped up to help. Out came his monitors and needles; blood splattered all over the place.]

[I thought] I'm not coming back here; I'd rather die.

Don stopped taking the heart medication cold turkey and left the hospital. (Charmaz 1999:370–71)

The moral of this story? It is a story of moral struggle. Loss of control compromises human worth and moral standing. Don's story and others like it reflect more than John Wayne bravado, or a gamble to emerge the victor against the worst odds. Rather, such stories reflect these men's tacit views of legitimate moral rights and subsequent moral claims to retain their status as competent men. Maintaining control of their lives affirmed their assumptions about masculinity and their place in male hierarchies.

Suffering confers judgments of moral status on the sufferer. Both self and others assess, judge, and locate this individual and his or her situation. Moral claims of the sufferer, of those involved, and of those who study such situations—follow. Like poverty and difference, serious illness threatens moral status and social worth. A person's moral status in suffering is neither singular nor static; it is situated in a hierarchy of moral worth. An elevated moral status confers legitimacy with entitlements for care, concern, and commitment. However, judgments of entitlement can change. A diminished moral status renders moral claims questionable or illegitimate. Anyone with a serious illness may plummet down this hierarchy, depending on the relative legitimacy, type, cause, and consequences of his or her suffering. Poverty and difference both prompt and accelerate a person's descent.

Don Dietz's experience with illness and Helen Gedding's trials at Green Pastures illustrate struggles against losing control and attempts to maintain moral status and moral worth. Both of their stories suggest sociological underpinnings shaping the storyteller's point of view. A sociological sensitivity forms the backdrop of the ethnographic story. A sociological vision appears in the foreground of the interview tale. How might these two stories reflect larger issues about inquiry? What might these stories suggest about the values on which our studies are founded? Does not our inquiry also elicit moral claims about our discipline and evoke judgments of moral status attributed to it?

### **LOOKING BACKWARD AT STORYTELLING AND TELLING SOCIOLOGY**

We can find some parallels between my research tales and sociological stories.<sup>3</sup> Granted, the scope, scale, time span, and purposes of sociological accounts differ. However, research tales and sociological reporting both offer renderings of reality; both include claims about it. They each contain a logic that fosters certain understandings, justifications, emotions, and actions. An implicit set of rules may shape the forms that research tales and sociological reporting may take, who is entitled to construct them, and what moral claims these individuals can reasonably make. Such moral claims are claims for credibility—for trust and for accepting a set of standards.

Sociological stories, theories, research reports, and class lectures are imbued with moral meanings. We, too, argue for moral imperatives. Views and values inform our inquiry, even when they are implicit. But which views and values are they? Which should they be?

When I was at Green Pastures, my tools of inquiry resembled the first third of the century more than the last. Like Chicago school ethnographers of yesteryear,

graduate students in the late 1960s learned qualitative methods mainly through immersion, pluck, and persistence. No ready-made analysis of gender was available to sharpen our gaze of how institutional practices affected men and women and how they responded to them. A renewal of sociological attention to poverty had just begun. The theoretical hegemony of functionalism had masked deep divisions of race, class, and gender in North America.

Nevertheless, the works of Erving Goffman (1959, 1961, 1963, 1967) and Harold Garfinkel (1956, 1967) already reverberated through the discipline. And then there were the classical theorists. When looking backward, we must pay tribute to the classical theorists of the nineteenth and early twentieth century (Durkheim 1938, 1951, 1960, 1961; Marx 1904, 1960, 1964; Weber 1949, 1958, 1964). They still afford us much to mine in the twenty-first century.

Looking backward assumes the present; it is a way of being present. Consistent with Mead (1934), the vantage point of the present shapes views of the past (see also Maines, Sugrue, and Katovich 1983). The twenty-first century is a time to look back to the classics and build on them, not to ignore them. Rather than use classical theories as end points of research, we can use them as starting points to raise questions *for* research (Blumer 1969). Rather than dismiss these theorists' explanations and predictions along with their foundational assumptions, we can consider the logic of their foundational questions. At a time when ethnic, racial, and religious conflicts result in misery and massacres throughout the world, basic questions about the nature of social order and social change remain essential topics of study. The proliferation of communication technologies raises fundamental questions anew about the relationship of the individual to the collective and about the social construction of self.<sup>4</sup> The transformation from a national to a world economy, the global reach of capitalism, and the dominance of transnational corporations make theoretical and empirical inquiry into power crucial, not merely timely. Questions that classical theorists raised in previous centuries still offer ideas for shaping inquiry in the twenty-first century.

The twentieth century has given sociologists much to celebrate, from macro issues to micro questions that advance theory and inform substantive fields. Naive views of early sociologists who studied "social disorganization" have been refined. Now we have sophisticated analyses of social structure that reveal patterned processes and subtle changes such as inequalities within it (see, e.g., Braverman 1974; Collins 1998; England 1992; Feagin 1991; Giddens 1973; Wright 1985). As Virginia Olesen's (2000) review attests, feminist research has made gender inequality a central focus of the discipline. In addition, feminist research has generated fresh theory as well as fundamental rethinking of major social institutions such as the family and work. Dorothy Smith's (1996, 1999) work has influenced the adoption of phenomenological assumptions in feminist scholarship. In this view, knowing persons must be located in their bodies and actions and that social inquiry must begin from this existential location. The emergence of a revitalized sociology of emotions has undermined the overrationalized view of human nature characterizing sociology in midcentury (see, e.g., Cancian 1987; Gordon 1981; Hochschild 1983; Shott 1979). And there have been many more developments in the discipline.

## CHALLENGES TO FOUNDATIONAL ASSUMPTIONS

During the latter part of the twentieth century, our forms of inquiry broadened. A qualitative revolution extended across disciplines and fields (Denzin and Lincoln 1994, 2000). It encompassed a variety of methods of data collection and analysis, including ethnography, grounded theory, historical comparative methods, and conversational analysis. Ironically, at the same historical juncture when qualitative research has gained ascendancy, it has become viewed as modernist, that is, *out of date*. Various postmodernisms challenge the value and the views put forth by qualitative researchers as well as the discipline itself.

Diverse commentators, including at least three Pacific Sociological Association past presidents—Lyn Lofland (1993), David Snow (Snow and Morrill 1993), and Jonathan Turner (Allan and Turner 2000)—point out that the domain questions of the postmodern turn have been raised before. That's correct. Most of them have been. Early in the twentieth century theoreticians in the natural sciences questioned theories of knowledge: viewers merged with what they viewed (Bridgman 1927, 1938). In the social sciences critiques emerged that challenged the dominant positivist paradigm of midcentury. C. Wright Mills's *The Sociological Imagination* (1959) disputed the significance of current grand theory and refuted accepted methodological prescriptions. Peter Winch's *The Idea of a Social Science* (1958) challenged assumptions of accumulative knowledge, and Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) spurred epistemological questions and captured theoreticians' imaginations. Readings of earlier sociolinguists spawned interest in relationships among language, social structure, and values (Sapir 1949; Whorf 1956). Language and grammar were portrayed as embedded in values and, thus, shaped *which* facts viewers defined.

The epistemological debates of the 1960s questioned the nature of objectivity, the separation of fact and value, the relativity and conditional nature of truth claims, and the relation between the viewer and the viewed. Conceptions of scientific truth abandoned nineteenth-century positivist quests for discovery of natural laws. Twentieth-century truth became *truths* with a small *t* as good positivists have long argued—conditional and subject to revision with the accumulation of new knowledge. Scientists defined these truths through consensus about established empirical findings and how to interpret them. This consensus, however, encourages some scientists to reify theories and findings and thus forget about espousing a provisional view of truth. Of course, their empirical findings nonetheless reflected their respective theoretical frames and specific conditions of inquiry.

These earlier debates occurred throughout theoretical circles in several disciplines, ours among them. When looking backward, a series of works took up these themes, for example, Aaron V. Cicourel's *Method and Measurement in Sociology*, (1964), Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's, *The Social Construction of Reality* (1967), Robert Freidrichs's, *A Sociology of Sociology* (1970), and Alvin Gouldner's *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* (1970). Epistemological debates had some influence in theory and on qualitative research and then, later, on sectors of historical sociology but, in my view, only occasionally resonated throughout the discipline.

Stanford Lyman (1997) observes that his coauthored book with Marvin Scott, *The Sociology of the Absurd* (1970), presaged key assumptions inherent in poststruc-

turalism and postmodernism. These assumptions include (1) a view that the world has no inherent meaning, although social actors regard it as meaningful, and (2) the position that self and society are founded on radical constructionism. For Lyman, "social construction is reality" (1997:14).

What effect did these epistemological debates of the 1960s and early 1970s have on day-to-day research? I say very little. They may have influenced how theoretically oriented sociologists *thought* about social reality. They did influence how epistemologically sophisticated teachers *taught* about social worlds. Yet they did not influence how most research sociologists *learned* about social life. Quantitative and qualitative methodologists went about doing routine work in routine ways. What about values? The value-free ethos held sway in many departments. The dominant positivist paradigm reigned. Until the end of the 1960s activist and Marxist research often remained suspect and was marginalized.<sup>5</sup> Most qualitative and quantitative methodologists aimed to gather accurate observations in keeping with objectivist preconceptions. Therefore, we remained neutral and passive and tried to keep our values out of the research process. We may have acknowledged that our values informed our choice of research problem, but that was about all.<sup>6</sup> Qualitative methodologists sought to establish scientific credibility by gathering copious details. We often borrowed the language of positivist research and sought ways to obtain reliable and valid data and to make our studies replicable (see, e.g., Scott 1968; Glaser and Strauss 1965). We believed that we compiled facts and ordered them according to their inherent properties, not those that we defined. Seldom did we acknowledge the conditions of our work and the decisions we made along the way.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, our research findings resulted from the hows and whys of research practice.<sup>8</sup>

Postmodernisms have challenged the modernist underpinnings of our discipline: Enlightenment beliefs in rationality, progress, human perfectibility, and scientific solutions are questioned. I only consider several implications of the challenge to modernism for how we conduct inquiry. Postmodernisms may represent passing fads and be full of foibles, a late-twentieth-century version of the sort that Pitirim Sorokin (1956) pointed out at midcentury. However, several dimensions of varied postmodernist critiques merit mentioning here. These perspectives (1) attend to the relationship between the viewer and the viewed; (2) focus on texts, language, and literary forms of presentation; (3) question traditional social scientific conventions concerning representation of research participants; and (4) emphasize the commodification of culture. The currency of these perspectives has been bolstered by their appeal to new scholars.

The scope of postmodern critiques distinguishes them from earlier epistemological debates. These critiques dispute foundational assumptions and grand narratives of modernity, in general, and of scientific inquiry and social theory, in particular. And they do so powerfully. But do they advance our discipline?

Postmodernist perspectives have provided a fresh view of the role of culture and culture-producing industries. They have also fostered an encompassing reflexivity about the relation between the viewer and viewed. This reflexivity renews emphasis on the moral responsibilities of the social scientist. These moral responsibilities differ in kind and content from positivist prescriptions of neutrality, dis-

tance, and objectivity. The appeal of postmodernist perspectives to new scholars—particularly in their radical subjectivist forms—emphasizes or privileges, to use the current vernacular, the investigator's self and subjectivity over social life and collective conditions. In an ironic twist, these perspectives with roots in studying social structure, culture, and colonialism now celebrate the consciousness of the observer.

What, then, are the implications of these perspectives for inquiry? For standards of research? What might we adopt from these perspectives? What should we question and reject? In which ways might these perspectives influence how we move forward in the twenty-first century?

### REGARDING INQUIRY

Renewed emphasis on words and writing, authority and representation, and discourse and texts leads to recognizing that *how* we talk about our studies merges with *what* we have to say about them. The how and what of inquiry rests on moral choices, whether conscious or not. Many postmodernists would disavow claims to objectivity; most would disavow positivist notions of objectivity. However, we can look at postmodern disavowals another way. They may be taken as reminders that ultimately science rests on consensus. Claims to scientific neutrality, and science more generally, are hollow, if they are not also buttressed by the power and consensus of colleagues.

Building on the past means preserving lessons from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and passing them on to future generations. Moving forward in the twenty-first century means reflecting on our ways of knowing, including assertions of truth, objectivity, and authority. It means recognizing and examining our moral claims about what we do, how we do it, and what we believe we know as a result of doing it. It means thorough data collection and analysis for every mode of empirical inquiry. A positivist devotion to empirical detail has its place. Details form the content for constructing our interpretations.

As we move our discipline forward into the twenty-first century, which issues should we address? We have successes to celebrate, failures to learn from, and some things to doubt. We must continue to be open to a variety of approaches. We must agree on sound standards of inquiry consistent with each approach and uphold our standards. A new Ph.D. from a respected department told me about her poststructuralist ethnographic study of how power is enacted in a corporate setting. As we talked I discovered that our meanings of "ethnography" differed. Her data consisted of field notes taken during two weekends and one week when she roamed a mega-mall as a consumer, nowhere near corporate offices and executive decisions. From these brief encounters, this researcher claimed to have studied "enacted power." However, a study of enacted power promises empirical investigation of individual and collective actions that constitute power. Recording use of commercial space such as positioning of displays, staff distributions, and ways of routing visitors may yield interesting data, but such field notes say little about *how* power is enacted. A fine field research exercise does not make a completed study. This researcher asked me, "If this isn't ethnography, then what is ethnography?" It means something with teeth.<sup>9</sup>

Ethnography cannot be reduced to a metaphor; it is a method that demands engagement, skill, and persistence.<sup>10</sup>

Other forms of research may also have shallow roots. Superficial, inaccurate, or incomplete data vitiate inquiry and undermine moral claims predicated on it. Surveys may lack both mutually exclusive categories and sufficient pretesting. The detailed 1999 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics and conducted by the Gallup Organization contains a sprinkling of poorly conceived items. Question #29 asks, "How many of each of the following have you presented/published etc. during your entire career and during the last two years?" This question contains six items such as refereed articles or creative works, nonrefereed articles or creative works. Then, item #4 reads: "Textbooks, other books; monographs; research or technical reports disseminated internally or to clients."

A textbook equals an unpublished technical report? All books are alike? A textbook is equivalent to a scholarly study? These categories merit being lumped in the same questionnaire item? Since when? How can this questionnaire item yield useful information, much less reliable data? Of course, the problem may have derived from not having a sociologist construct the questionnaire.

We need to rethink our taken-for-granted approaches. Sociologists ranging from positivists to post-structuralists call for taking status variables—race, class, and gender—into account in research studies. (But, curiously, they do not stress age or extent of physical ability; I guess they just are not old enough.) Yet, typically, status variables are viewed as givens, as though invariant. In the twenty-first century we can look at race, class, gender, age, and physical ability in new ways. We can study how research participants imbue them with meaning and act on them, a point Robert Prus (1996) makes exceptionally well. We can discover how collective meanings are attributed to these variables in specific social worlds. Recent public discussions of self-identification of race on census questionnaires indicate that lay concepts of race are far more complex than indicated by routine survey research categories (Schevitz 2000).

Ethical codes for the discipline should reflect diverse forms of inquiry within it. Any prescription for inquiry must be viewed in the context of the specific conditions of research. Institutional review boards adopt models more fitting for medical research than social research. Informed consent often protects the powerful, not the powerless. Informed consent forms and institutional reviews assume that we know what we will see and find before we can look. Good qualitative research is open-ended and emergent; we cannot predict precisely where our inquiry will take us.

The recent emphasis on reflexivity has resonated more strongly in the theoretical and qualitative sectors of our discipline than in other areas. Reflexivity has become an integral part of feminist research, which, in turn, has strong theoretical and qualitative roots (see, e.g., Cancian 1992; Hertz 1997; Olesen 2000; Smith 1999). This reflexivity fosters sensitivity to representation of our participants and can foster careful, nuanced, and circumscribed research. Certainly, locating our studies in historical periods, diverse cultures, specific institutions, local worlds, and interactional moments helps to define the context of our research.

Smith (1999) contends that sociologists reproduce ruling relations in our research. The extent to which we do so remains an empirical question and likely varies with different methods, topics, and perspectives. If we initiate research as external authorities, then the chances increase that we will frame our methods and reports accordingly. Bringing participants into the research process is one current strategy to make research more egalitarian and to preserve subjects' views and voices.<sup>11</sup> Surely, bringing research participants into project planning may correct some potential problems and make hidden hierarchical assumptions visible. Still, noble intentions may have unintended consequences. Sociologists who share research decisions with their research participants may assume that they have similar interests, intentions, and interpretations (see Miller 2000). Many may, some may not. Recall the patient at Green Pastures Rehabilitation Center who bargained for a new set of false teeth, not lofty rehabilitation goals. Like him, our participants may not share our research goals. Some research participants may wish to rewrite events and, therefore, their lives. Others may wish to curtail criticism. Certain respondents find new affirmation of their experience; for them, participation means existential validation. One interview respondent who read drafts of my chapters said, "I like this. It's fun."

Other respondents may discover that participation extracts too much from them. Existential confrontations and ideological challenges may follow. After I had written more than half of my book on the experience of chronic illness, I sought new interview respondents to check my categories. Several of these men and women asked to read chapters but did not finish them. My work became painful or onerous for them (Charmaz 1995). A young nurse asked to read some of my work when I first requested an interview. When we met she talked openly about her refusal to accept a diagnosis of multiple sclerosis. She used a cane and described having classic symptoms of multiple sclerosis such as intermittent slurred speech, double vision, urinary frequency, and constant fatigue. Her story overflowed with fear and sorrow. After a terrible first marriage, this young woman believed that marrying her new fiancé would transform a gloomy past into a bright future. She described her first husband's rage as having led to beatings and death threats. Although she hid when she left him, he found her and continued to terrify her. One night he called to tell her that he would again find her and she would not live to see another day. Instead, the police found him. Rather than go quietly, he shot himself in the head. How might reading my work affect this young woman? Learning about how other people pieced vague symptoms into a bona fide disease would undermine her insistence that her illness was not serious. The moral discourse between her and her fiancé could change. She might lose him. Her hopes for a happy marriage might slip away. Perhaps for her and, albeit less dramatically, for several men, reading manuscript chapters evoked an existential confrontation with self—one that they may not have been ready to make.

Representation of research participants raises a variety of issues. Not everyone wants to be "represented." Research participants may talk willingly but specify that they do not want their complete stories told, much less become recognizable characters in published works. Then, too, stories are selective. People tell them in relation to specific audiences at a particular time. Later, when they redefine their

situations, they forget their earlier views. "Did I say that?" asked several of my interview respondents.

Bringing participants into the research process poses questions of representation and authorship. It may be difficult to represent participants as we see them if they help us produce the research report. The loyalty of friendship complicates authorship. Who should own the finished product (see Cancian 1992; Miller 2000)? Whose story was it? Whose has it become?

Like our research participants, our preconceived views, too, may shape what we see. Like them, we can also confuse our agendas with theirs. Knowingly or unwittingly, we might shape our research stories in a particular direction. A researcher may want to tell a sociological story—sex workers as victims, elders as isolated, chronically ill adults as devastated, poor people as oppressed and, by extension, without agency. There may be much truth in the sociological story that the researcher wants to tell.<sup>12</sup> However, participants may take exception to the images we paint of them. Other researchers may also argue that an earlier researcher got the story wrong. W. A. Marianne Boelen (1992) challenged William Foote Whyte's (1957) rendering of "Cornerville," which, in turn, elicited Whyte's defense (1992), the views of commentators (e.g., Denzin 1992; Richardson 1992), and a rebuttal by a research participant (Orlandella 1992).

Our standpoint shapes how we see respondents' stories—and may stand in juxtaposition to theirs. We may unconsciously select aspects of their lives or episodes within their stories to illustrate our own. By doing so, we can subvert their voices and distort their realities as they know them.

All possible, all true. However, *detailed*, full data and an openness to grappling with these data through systematic analysis does much to correct interpretation through preconception. However imperfect and conditional, we have something to say.

### MOVING FORWARD IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

How do we move forward? What does moving forward involve? It involves considering and critiquing past and present sociological perspectives and practices. It means building on studied ideas, advancing inquiry, and affecting social change. Adopting the term "moving forward" invokes the modernist assumption that progress is possible. Progress connotes improvement, although a belief in the *possibility* of progress holds no promise of total and timeless solutions. As sociologists we know that change brings unintended consequences. Still, notions of moving forward assume that systematic sociological study can contribute to progress—in the theoretical foundation of our discipline, in empirical knowledge, and in positive social change.

What might it take to move forward in the twenty-first century? We must acknowledge the moral underpinnings of inquiry and our knowledge claims and examine our various, sometimes conflicting, moral claims within reasoned discourse. Moving forward means identifying our moral hierarchies. It means assessing explicit and implicit values and priorities reflected in them. Who benefits from them? Are these moral hierarchies ones we wish to honor? Do they merely reflect established

power and prestige prerogatives in the discipline? Might those prerogatives remain latent but nonetheless reemerge in the face of conflict or threat?

Moving forward means revisiting and, likely, revising how we construct the moral foundations of our discipline. It means examining which values form this foundation. It means consciousness of the moral underpinnings of positions we take in an emerging global exchange of ideas. The twenty-first century marks the shift from local to global worlds of association and study. Accompanying this shift is the opportunity to reexamine and revise *our* assumptions about power, difference, and hierarchy.

Our collective practices need scrutiny. Areas in the discipline have expanded laterally rather than hierarchically. Thus, moving forward means bringing those from the margins into a broadened center of the discipline, to transplant a post-modernist notion. A broadened center implies inclusion rather than theoretical, methodological, or substantive imperialism. But it does not mean abandoning standards for conducting inquiry, or for evaluating completed studies. A broadened center alters both moral hierarchies and status hierarchies. It respects standards but reduces national, regional, and political barriers to participation. Not least, it means recognizing teachers who may sacrifice their own intellectual development to spark students' minds.

A considered critique of our assumptions and actions is in order. Analyses of the commodification of culture and of consciousness supply some clues. We teachers often talk of the commodification of education based on a corporate consumerist model. This model presupposes that students possess sufficient knowledge to make consequential judgments about a field before mastering any comprehensive knowledge of it. Student consumers purchase educational products. They evaluate, select, and ingest products prepared for them—or reject them if they are too difficult, inconvenient, or unsettling. All that as if all course content came from the same mix and could be poured into similar packages. Yet some courses are as tough as stewed hearts.

Commodification has also permeated our consciousness. We seldom acknowledge that. Limited opportunities combined with rampant careerism have had effects: we become commodities. Moreover, we participate in our own commodification and institutionalized practices encourage this participation. We reproduce ourselves as commodities when we package our work, time, and selves as products to be bought and sold in the career market. Taken collectively, such individual actions leave their imprint on the discipline.

A rush to publish favors quantity of publications over quality of ideas. Market demands lead to viewing our teaching and research as products. Then we may tailor these products to gain the most popularity or prestige in the least amount of time. The consequences? Innovative ideas remain undeveloped. Purposes change. Passionate interests fade. Moral claims weaken for teaching tough ideas and for conducting research with teeth.

At this turn of the twenty-first century, I take the presidential prerogative of inviting scholars, old and new, to renew our commitment to empirical inquiry. Day-to-day jobs may flood our lives and drown our research plans. Yet we must remain active in our inquiry; we must remain an empirical discipline. It is never

too late to return to the empirical world. To new scholars, I say follow your passions when choosing topics of inquiry. Yet locate your passionate interests in social purposes that transcend idiosyncratic subjective experience. Make a difference in the realm of ideas and in practical action.<sup>13</sup> Henri Bergson ([1903] 1961) observed almost one hundred years ago there are two ways of knowing a phenomenon: moving around it and entering into it. Both ways of knowing have value. Gather details about your topic. Go and look, listen, and learn. Go deep into the phenomenon. See it with a sociological eye. You'll find stories to tell.

Life is in the details. Details lie within experience. They are captured in precise questionnaire items. They are constructed from the ethnographer's view. Still, we cannot base our moral claims on the superiority of our methods. Granted, no textual analysis of institutional records would uncover meanings of stewed hearts and false teeth. Sanitized records fail to report gritty, inconvenient facts of life. Texts without contexts obscure the details that constitute them. Methods are only a means of knowing, not knowing itself. Use them judiciously. We cannot hide behind our methods, but we can use them (Charmaz and Mitchell 1996). We can garner the courage to face the unknown. And then try to understand it. Ultimately, the responsibility for reporting what we see, know, and think is ours.

In preparing this talk, Goffman's (1961) work at St. Elizabeths Hospital echoed in my memories of Green Pastures. Goffman's concept of a total institution transformed our understanding of diverse people-processing facilities and the denizens residing in them. Like the residents of Green Pastures, mental patients had moral careers that began before hospitalization and continued long after. Goffman's classic study offered a novel idea and produced an ethnography of a concept, the total institution (Manning 1992). I recall reading some years ago that other research sociologists worked at St. Elizabeths Hospital on other projects while Goffman was there. I do not recall where I saw this bit of information. I asked Goffman scholars about the reference and about these sociologists. Three thought that other sociologists were at St. Elizabeths Hospital then but had no firm data. Two senior mental health experts had more information. They confirmed that Leonard I. Pearlin (1962) conducted his important study shortly after Goffman's time at St. Elizabeths. And, yes, other sociologists conducted research at St. Elizabeths while Goffman was there. The information can be reconstructed, although its significance at midcentury might not be recaptured. Disciplinary history grows distant and memories fade, and with them much research of yesteryear. Yet everyone remembers Goffman's idea of the total institution.

The moral of this story? Tell your own sociological story. Tell it with heart and give it some teeth. Build your story on a sturdy empirical foundation and bring it the strength of studied sociological insight. Our individual and collective works create the discipline and its influence. Subsequently, our endeavors shape the moral claims about our discipline that we can make and influence those moral judgments that our varied audiences may make of it. Each contribution counts. Transform knowledge and experience of reality with the power of your ideas. Better yet, transform reality and the moral meanings that support it. The century is yours.

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### NOTES

1. Lack of identification with frail, disoriented, or disabled elders has long been observed among younger and healthier senior citizens (see, e.g., Gubrium 1975; Hochschild 1973).
2. See Paterniti 2000 for perceptive observations of the subtle and silent communication possible with withdrawn institutionalized elders.
3. For an early discussion of sociological stories, see Davis 1974; for a recent reflection, see Charmaz 1999a.
4. The Internet poses both possibilities and problems for research. It extends the reach of inquiry but simultaneously allows research participants to make unwarranted claims about their identities (Nakamura 1999; Waskul, Douglass, and Edgley 2000).
5. Cancian's (1995) research supports my assertion. Her survey of three major sociology journals showed the dominance of functionalism through 1968; she also found that specialists in inequality unmasked inequality but ignored social reform.
6. In my view a researcher's values influence research sites to seek, criteria for selecting respondents to sample, choice of methods, thoroughness of data collection, modes of data analysis, and styles of reporting. I find it preferable to make values explicit and to examine them rather than deny their existence.
7. See Fletcher 1974 for an excellent portrayal of the vicissitudes of conducting traditional survey research with all the human shaping of the process. Fletcher shows how decisions along the way subvert claims to objectivity and reliable findings.
8. Theory and research held different positions in the sociological division of labor and often had little effect on each other. And both theorists and methodologists developed technical languages and practices distant from everyday life, thereby making our discipline arcane and esoteric—well, academic.
9. Margaret Purser (pers. com., March 3, 2000) points out that ethnography has become a metaphor instead of a method. As such, some scholars claim the term but do not complete the detailed study and recording of a particular group's round of life that has traditionally defined ethnography.
10. Schwalbe (1995) makes a strong argument that accepted canons of conducting ethnographic research exist and should frame inquiry. Although his position is contested, it reflects a traditional view in qualitative research.

11. Bringing audible sociological voices together with participants' voices may prove a worthy venture. But we must be careful—as Devault (1999) says, we must be careful with our participants, reasoned in our approach.
12. For example, Davidson (1998) notes that radical feminists view sex work as rape and as maintained by patriarchal power relations. She states that this view may reflect one kind of truth but contends that this truth neither demonstrates how institutionalized sex work is supported and perpetuated nor delineates how it is organized in varied circumstances. She states that some sex workers can negotiate clients' demands to fit the services they are willing to give. She argues that interpretive inquiry provides insights into the organization and maintenance of sex work that modify a larger structural view. Nonetheless, those of us who work within an interpretive paradigm are not immune from uncritically importing a larger sociological story into our narratives.
13. A caveat: any topic, however mundane, can be made sociologically and socially significant. Engaging the phenomenon and taking a fresh look inside, underneath, through, and beyond it casts mundane topics in new light. Goffman's oeuvre demonstrates that, as does Chambliss's (1989) article on the mundanity of excellence. Work, skill, and insight can raise research on mundane activities beyond the trite or commonplace.

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