The passion in my voice emerges from the playful tension between multiple, diverse, and sometimes contradictory locations I inhabit. There is no unitary representation to be formed here, no fixed sense of what is to be (hooks, 1994, p. 208).

The goal of our work is not to amass generalizations atop which a theoretical tower can someday be erected. The special task of the social scientist in each generation is to pin down the contemporary facts (Cronbach, 1975, p. 126).

Imagine a single chapter whose aim was to cover the breadth of approaches, theory, and arguments in quantitative research, and how these could apply to community psychology. I am aware of a similar absurdity here; compressing a vast and highly articulated literature and history into a single review seems an act of hubris at best, folly at least. Nonetheless, judging from my own methodological training in psychology, it seems an introduction is in order, along with, at least, a sketchy roadmap of the domain. This chapter offers no “how to,” but instead is an attempt at an orientation or sensitization to qualitative inquiry—why it seems to be an emergent and increasingly valid consideration, how it shares many of the same values and concerns as community psychology, its advantages, and its problems. The chapter also makes a case for why community psychology and qualitative inquiry should be at the beginning of a potentially beautiful relationship.

Qualitative methods and research have a long and distinguished history in the social sciences (e.g., Dilthey, 1894; Rabinow & Sullivan, 1987). Within psychology, no less a figure than Wilhelm Wundt called for a “second,” qualitative “cultural psychology” (Cahan & White, 1992; Jahoda, 1989). William James’ The Principles of Psychology (1891/1983), an ever fresh and informative classic, is singularly non-quantitative and interpretive. The psychologist (and anthropologist) John Dollard went to the American South in the 1930s to do an ethno­graphic study of race and class relations there (Dollard, 1937), writing a book well worth a look, not least for Dollard’s reflections on the act of research. For community psychologists in particular, it is worth noting that what may have been the first modern community study was

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W. E. B. Du Bois’ (1967) ethnographic *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*, originally published in 1899. There is also a tradition of qualitative approaches in educational and developmental psychology, the case study in clinical psychology, and the observational and generative work that often precedes quantification. Yet, despite an occasional efflorescence, qualitative research has not figured prominently in discussion and training of psychological research. More surprising, however, is that qualitative methods and theories, until quite recently, have been marginalized within community psychology; it is surprising because qualitative methods seem ideal to a discipline that seeks to work *with* rather than *on* people and communities.

Why there should be this marginalization is a matter for argument. However, I agree with Bruner (1986) that psychology’s cognitive revolution in the late 1950s and 1960s ironically produced a reductionistic, universalistic, and acontextual view of mind and “behavior” that came to dominate psychology for decades. This is ironic because, as Bruner points out, the “cognitive revolution” was originally about restoring meaning and intentionality back to psychology (1990). Academic psychology’s roots in psychometrics is probably another contributor to our quantifying preferences, as is our envy of the so-called harder sciences (e.g., Sarason, 1981). It is also true, for those of us with social change aspirations, quantitative research has often been an effective tool for, and provided legitimation of, our efforts (Kitzinger, 1997). It would also be ridiculous to imply that there has not been a great deal of very good and valuable quantitative research; in fact, I wish to avoid the either/or character of much discussion of qualitative “versus” quantitative inquiry.

**CHANGE OF VOICE:**
**THE “EMERGENCE” OF QUALITATIVE INQUIRY**

In recent years, however, qualitative and interpretive research has become a legitimate topic for discussion for community psychology (e.g., Brydon-Miller & Tolman, 1997; Miller & Banyard, 1998). Why this is the case is also probably a matter for argument; however, some factors can be identified. One such factor is undoubtedly the “linguistic turn” in philosophy and social theory (e.g., Giddens, 1986; Miller & Hoogstra, 1992; Ricouer, 1992; Rorty, 1982), based in the work of Peirce, Heidegger, and (the later) Wittgenstein, and gradually seeping through the social sciences. Language, as both constituting and being constituted by social practices, and as spanning the conceptual divide between individual and culture, private and public, becomes both the object of, and a vehicle for, social science research, rather than a poor, messy, or “preliminary” substitute for numbers. As Wittgenstein (1953) put it, “It is only in language that one can mean something by something” (p. 18).

Related to this turn is what Hamilton (1994) refers to as the “epistemological disarray” of the 1970s, in which positivism was confronted by constructionism and deconstructionism, post-structuralism, and cultural and historical relativism, when the lines between qualitative and quantitative inquiry were blurred (e.g., Bloor, 1976; Cook & Campbell, 1979). Positivism, and some of the notions of validity associated with it, also came under attack from *within* the ranks of its leading thinkers; former champions of a positivistic psychology confessed that validity was ultimately a matter of interpretation (e.g., Cronbach, 1984, and the epigraph above; Rorty, 1982). That is not to say that all tenets of positivism and empiricism were abandoned, clearly that is not the case. What this “disarray” and the debates it generated did