

BOOK REVIEW: *Mindful Inquiry in Social Research* by Valerie Malhotra Bentz and Jeremy J. Shapiro (1998) SAGE Publications

This was the first book about research that I've read as a new doctoral student – but it sure won't be the last! It was an excellent introduction: being written by two of the scholar-professors in my doctoral program, reading it was like an introduction into "our" culture of inquiry – an initiation into a way of "being-in-the-world" representative of the scholar-practitioners that will be my mentors and advisors. That's a prominent realization that emerged through reading the reading of this book: being a doctoral student – becoming a researcher and scholar – is very much a way of life, very much interactive socialization in a community. Once you're engaged, once you've been initiated, can you ever return to your former state?

I appreciated the way the authors provided a strong historical context within which to frame the practicing of social research in the current era. After tracing the pursuit and construction of knowledge through its "modern," "positivist" period, characterized as it was by the certainty that there were "objective," "absolute" truths to be obtained by rational inquiry, through the current "postmodern" era of "chaos," the authors reach a salient conclusion: "To be an inquirer in the human and social sciences, you now have to become something of an epistemologist, a theorist of knowledge. Because you cannot simply fall back on Positivism as your ultimate foundation, you have to create your own...In the face of the extreme relativist challenge of postmodern theory, we need to construct an intellectual edifice from scratch" (pp. 31, 25).

How interesting: we're all to be noetic pioneers. While there may not be any security left anymore – there are indeed no absolute truths, and it's becoming apparent that there isn't even an actual 'self' to fall back on – we are left with the awesome, exciting opportunity of bringing forth a world that is yet to be known! As neo-constructors of a neo-knowledge base we are (in the radical phrasing of Guy Burneko, a scholar-professor from my Masters program) "co-worlding in humanocosmopoiesis," "we are midwifing a humanocosmogogenesis."

To equip us with tools for this noetic journey of discovery, the authors summon four research traditions, the synthesis of which is their "mindful social inquiry" – *our* culture of inquiry: Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Critical Social Theory, and Buddhism. Through the narrative of the text, each of these is shown in its unique way to provide a valuable perspective especially suited for conducting social research in the current postmodern era – for escaping from the mental shackles of "positivism," and for the task of constructing a new world. Each in turn is shown to be its own culture of inquiry with its own methodology and research tradition.

The last few chapters of the book give voice to other cultures of inquiry, including: Ethnography, Quantitative and Behavioral Inquiry, Action Research, Evaluation Research, Comparative-Historical Inquiry, and Theoretical Inquiry. By describing the relative strengths and weaknesses of these other traditions, and the particular applications for which they are best suited, this book becomes a well-rounded, useful, comprehensive introduction to the potential cultures of inquiry available to the neophyte scholar-inquirer.

Thank you Jeremy and Valerie.