Meditations on the Ideology of Inquiry in Higher Education: Exposition, Critique, and Conjecture

Clifton F. Conrad

Throughout the 1980s, there have been lively and unfettered debates in many disciplines and fields regarding the purposes of inquiry, alternative paradigms and perspectives, and the processes and products of inquiry. Meanwhile, aside from the writings of a handful of individuals (G. Keller 1986; Peterson 1986)—most notably Yvonna Lincoln (Lincoln and Guba 1985)—the higher education literature has been curiously silent. Not surprisingly, our scholarship continues to reflect conventional approaches to inquiry. I am deeply concerned about our reluctance—as individuals and as a profession—to reconsider the meaning and conduct of inquiry in the field of higher education.

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The purpose of my essay is to reflect on some distinguishing features of our dominant ideology of inquiry—an ideology that is not a "bloodless abstraction" (Palmer 1987, 22) but the prime determinant of what we know about higher education and how we know it. Toward that end, I will examine four conventional beliefs that guide research in our field. These sometimes overlapping beliefs concern stakeholders, aims of inquiry, paradigm and modes of inquiry, and inquiry perspectives. For each, I will briefly describe the belief, offer a critique, and conjecture about future inquiry. I conclude the essay by suggesting some basic tenets for a renewed culture of inquiry to guide our community of scholars.

I have consulted with many friends and colleagues throughout the preparation of this paper; some of the ideas and perspectives considered here reflect that counsel. At the same time, preparing this essay has been a personal journey. My reflections are not those of a distant observer, but of one who has been passionately involved in higher education research for nearly two decades. In no small measure, then, this essay is part autobiographical, reflecting my continuing struggle to make sense out of my own research as well as the work of others. My criticisms and conjectures are aimed at my own scholarship as well as the research of others in our community of scholars.

STAKEHOLDERS: INQUIRY FOR WHOM?

Prevailing Belief:

Inquiry in higher education should be primarily oriented to scholarly peers rather than to other major stakeholding audiences (administrators/faculty, public policy-makers, and the educated public).

Most research by faculty in higher education is oriented to scholarly peers rather than other stakeholders—such as higher education decisionmakers and pratictioners as well as the public-at-large. Our research agendas, our emphasis on specialized knowledge, our frameworks and modes of inquiry, our rhetoric and the products of our inquiry—all reflect this conventional belief. The telltale signs are everywhere: specialized books and journal articles that report the results of technical studies; research topics that mirror the interests of scholars more than practitioners; the emphasis on quantitative

rather than qualitative ways of knowing; and a rhetoric of inquiry that enshrines academic language and a "stripped-down, cool style" (Firestone 1987, 17) at the expense of a more public prose.

Like other core beliefs in our ideology of inquiry, this one is rooted in the widespread practice of viewing higher education as an academic discipline rather than as a field of study. For many of us, our individual and collective legitimacy and stature within the academy are seen as closely allied with the disciplinary model and its basic premise that scholarly peers constitute the major audience for research. Tellingly, this view is reflected in our affirmation that the most significant research in higher education has been done by individuals—such as Burton Clark—who have been trained in an academic discipline and whose research, in general, is oriented more to like-minded scholars than to other stakeholding audiences.

Critique and Conjecture

Perhaps not least because the reward structure in higher education supports it, this prevailing belief has seldom been challenged within our field. Without relinquishing my commitment to the central role of academic scholarship and peer review, I find this belief self-serving and limiting in several major respects. First, our seemingly uncritical acceptance of higher education as a discipline seems to have undermined our sense of ethical responsibility to audiences outside of our peers. Administrators and faculty throughout higher education, public policy-makers, and the educated public—all have legitimate claims to and a stake in research about higher education. As citizens of colleges and universities, do we not bear a primary—rather than a secondary—responsibility to generate and disseminate knowledge that will benefit others as well as ourselves and our scholarly community?

Second, I strongly suspect that our disciplinary orientation and primary allegiance to our scholarly peers has isolated us from the agendas, perspectives, and insights of other stakeholders—especially from their self-reflections on their experience, which might provide a wellspring for generating some genuinely new ideas about higher education. With few exceptions, our research follows narrow disciplinary research agendas and restricted lines of inquiry, and echoes the extant literature. Our resulting isolation from higher education decision-makers and practitioners is not, I fear, unrelated to

what many of us consider the harsh truth about too much of
the recent higher education literature: it is lifeless and pedes-
trian, inward-looking and parochial, the product of assembly-
line research that has generated few new findings or chal-
lenging ideas.

In the context of these meditations, I think it is long past
time that we view higher education not narrowly as an
academic discipline but more broadly as a field of study. By
that I mean that higher education should be viewed as a field
like public administration, one that is multi-disciplinary and
organized around subject matter rather than a particular
method of inquiry. And as a field of study, I propose that we
conceptualize our inquiry in terms of a stakeholder-centered
model in which the needs of all major stakeholders—not just
our scholarly peers—provide the lodestar for inquiry.

Besides our scholarly community, who are those stakehold-
ing audiences that have a legitimate stake in higher education
research? From my perspective, there are three major audi-
ences: (1) administrators and faculty throughout higher
education, who need knowledge about everything from
assessment and student learning to leadership and resource
allocation; (2) public policy-makers, from the institutional to
the state and federal levels, who need a better knowledge-
base to inform their decisions about higher education gover-
nance, finance, planning, and quality; and (3) the educated
public, individuals who need and wish to be more informed
about our colleges and universities.

In what ways can we make our inquiry more responsive to
these—and perhaps other—stakeholder groups? Drawing on
recent discussions with individuals from these groups, as well
as conversations with my scholarly peers, I think that we
need to give special attention to at least five aspects of our
inquiry: our scholarly aims, our inquiry paradigm and modes
of inquiry, our inquiry perspectives, our research agendas,
and our approaches to disseminating our findings. Let me
briefly consider only the last two here, since I later discuss
the others.

To begin with, I think we need to encourage research
agendas that are more responsive to the concerns and needs
of our stakeholders—with at least one eye fixed on the
foreseeable future. Marketing, program review, technology
transfer, economic development and competitiveness, minor-

ity recruitment and retention, evaluating the effectiveness of campus services—all are topical areas of substantial contemporary importance that have received relatively little scholarly attention but which seem likely to engage administrators until well into the next century. Besides teaching and learning, college and university faculty will continue to be interested in research that addresses post-tenure evaluation, graduate and professional education, leadership and program quality, faculty governance, equity, and reward structures. Public policy-makers—from governors and state-wide higher education agencies to legislative bodies at the state and federal level—are likely to need research that addresses a variety of topical areas: accountability, assessment, higher education and economic development, institutional purpose and mission, governance of state higher education systems, federal and state funding of low-income students, and the creative use of limited resources. Finally, the educated public—that corpus of individuals who are concerned about higher education for a variety of reasons—increasingly needs greater knowledge and understanding about such topics as institutional quality, the costs of higher education, and the purposes and integrity of our colleges and universities.

If we are serious about a stakeholder-centered model of inquiry, we will also need to reexamine our approaches to dissemination of information. At the present time, most of us rely on traditional means of scholarly communication— books, monographs, journal articles, conference papers— aimed mostly at our scholarly peers. Aside from the ASHE/ ERIC Research Report Series, which has been successfully targeted at administrators and faculty, this association has not much concerned itself with disseminating findings to audiences outside of ourselves (Newell 1986). Furthermore, very few scholars within our field have been concerned about dissemination. A recent exception is the report (Stark and Lowther 1988) and materials circulated by the Professional Preparation Network at the University of Michigan that includes self-study guides for faculty concerned about integrating liberal arts goals with professional students' educational experiences.

Owing in part to the diversity of subgroups within each of the stakeholding audiences I have identified, this is a complex issue that is unlikely to yield easy solutions. As a point of

departure, however, let me suggest several considerations that might inform our discussion of dissemination. First, rather than establish costly new vehicles to disseminate our scholarship, we should encourage our colleagues to share their work through existing and emerging modes of dissemination that are utilized by various subgroups within each of our stakeholder audiences. For example, our administrative stakeholders are served by many diverse associations—such as the Council for the Advancement and Support of Higher Education (CASE), the College and University Personnel Association (CUPA), and the American Council on Education (ACE). In addition to practitioner journals, many of these associations have a monograph series and a newsletter, and more than a few are experimenting with innovative modes of communication such as electronic networking. A general and educated audience may be reached through such periodicals as *The New York Review of Books, Commentary, Harper's,* and *The New Republic,* as long as scholars are willing and able to communicate in a "public idiom" (Jacoby 1987, 7).

Second, to enhance our exchange with our various audiences, we should encourage our colleagues to reexamine their rhetoric of communication. Instead of the objectivist language of traditional scientific inquiry and obfuscatory verbiage, we need to adapt our language to our respective audiences. For example, most administrators and policy-makers place a premium on a language that is clear and forthright; the educated public is likely to favor rhetoric that is stimulating as well as informative. And all of our stakeholding audiences—save a few of our scholarly peers—are likely to be most receptive to writers that use an active voice, convey "neighborliness" (Savage 1988), and are openly invitational.

Third, in recognition of the complexity as well as the importance of this issue, I propose that ASHE establish a special task force on the feasibility of dissemination. This association might serve as a broker or clearinghouse between higher education researchers and our various audiences, propose ways to involve the policy and practitioner communities in adapting our research to specific audiences and contexts, and draw on the considerable body of literature on dissemination—including the journal *Knowledge: Creation, Diffusion, and Utilization*—to examine relations in our field between knowledge creation and knowledge use (DeMartini and Whitbeck 1986).

AIMS OF INQUIRY

Prevailing Belief:

> *Inquiry in higher education should be aimed at developing specialized knowledge rather than more broadly aimed at developing generalized knowledge.*

Not only do we produce knowledge for a narrow audience, but most of the knowledge we develop is highly specialized. Grounded in our overarching faith in higher education as a discipline, our philosophy of inquiry, and our commitment to research that addresses the intellectual concerns and sensibilities of a scholarly audience, most higher education researchers strongly believe in the sanctity of highly specialized knowledge. This belief is reflected in the disproportionate number of narrow, univariate, and technical studies that dominate our conference proceedings, our journals (Silverman 1982, 1987), and our professional discourse. With few exceptions, the greatest prestige in our field is accorded those who produce highly specialized studies on such topics as student attrition and faculty scholarly productivity.

Critique and Conjecture

Although there is a compelling need for specialized knowledge and technical studies, I find this core belief limiting. First, and most troubling, it has encouraged higher education researchers to focus their energies on gathering facts—on the acquisition of information. Preoccupied with data-gathering for narrow descriptive purposes, we have not emphasized understanding and interpretation that goes much beyond empirical generalization, narrow speculation, and low-level theory. We have too infrequently asked large and significant questions, and our knowledge base can be justifiably criticized as narrow, fragmented, and "esoteric" (Veblen 1924, 237).

Second, while some of our studies have yielded information that has been useful to higher education practitioners, our specialized knowledge—on balance—has not been viewed as valuable by administrators and faculty throughout higher education, by policy-makers, or by the general public. A few observers have publicly and caustically criticized us for conducting "small studies of small questions" (Weiner 1986, 160) and producing "junk" and "piffle" (in G. Keller 1985, 8); perhaps more painfully—and tellingly—most of us are acutely

aware that our major constituencies remain indifferent to our research. Based on my discussions with various stakeholders, it seems to me that our major audiences are less in need of highly specialized knowledge *per se* or "hands-on" knowledge than in generalized knowledge that addresses large and significant issues and offers illuminating perspectives and insights on those issues.

For these reasons, as well as my conviction that the legitimacy and long-term future of our field depend on the support of our stakeholders, I suggest that our research be aimed not exclusively at developing specialized knowledge but more broadly at developing generalized knowledge as well. This generalized body of knowledge would include observations, concepts, generalizations, and theories; and it would reflect a depth and breadth of understanding and interpretation that reaches beyond mere factual knowledge and seeks to address the needs of our major stakeholders. It would, of course, be built on "disciplined inquiry" (Cronbach and Suppes 1969, 17–18), that is, according to rigorous and widely accepted rules of scholarly inquiry that transcend specific methods.

If we are to enlarge our aims beyond narrow technical studies and broaden our conception of knowledge, our inquiry—in my judgment—should not be driven exclusively by narrow disciplinary research questions, by our paradigm, or by our modes of inquiry. For heuristic purposes, let me suggest four approaches to inquiry that seem especially well-suited to developing generalized knowledge: problem-centered, integrative, interpretive, and future-centered.

Problem-centered inquiry, as I define it, refers to interdisciplinary research that addresses large and significant issues and problems confronting higher education. As in many natural science disciplines and some professional fields, problem-centered inquiry is organized around major problems and issues that concern stakeholders—such as the political economy of universities. In addition to identifying issues, problem-centered research can involve stakeholders in the design, execution, and dissemination of research. If our research is to become more problem-centered in the future, we should especially encourage institutional and public policy studies (Fincher 1987) and evaluation studies (Rogers and Gamson 1982)—provided, of course, that they go beyond description and either contribute to theory-based knowledge or significantly enhance our general understanding of, for

example, a proposed student aid policy or an innovation in liberal education. At present, policy studies have gained some legitimacy in our field, but our literature includes relatively few such studies; evaluation studies are rarely accepted for publication, perhaps on the ground that they are often atheoretical even though they may contribute substantially to our general understanding. Beyond these two types of studies, most of our research could be more problem-centered and interdisciplinary, while continuing to draw on such traditional quantitative techniques as survey research and content analysis as well as the full repertoire of qualitative techniques.

By integrative inquiry I mean research and scholarship that seeks to "knit together what has already been learned" (Heclo 1974, x), including findings from the relevant academic disciplines (Clark 1974). Reviews of the literature that integrate studies narratively can be especially useful in developing syntheses of what is known about specific topics; *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research* has been an excellent vehicle for integrative reviews of the literature. At the same time, it seems to me that two additional kinds of studies are needed if integrative inquiry is to become more central to our scholarship: studies based on secondary analysis (Cook 1974), and meta-analytic studies (Glass, McGaw, and Smith 1981). Large amounts of both qualitative and quantitative data in our field could usefully be analyzed and reanalyzed to provide syntheses of what is known. Significantly, some of the most highly regarded scholarship on higher education—such as Jencks and Riesman's *The Academic Revolution* (1968)— have relied heavily on secondary analysis. Meta-analysis— the statistical analysis of the overall findings of numerous empirical studies—can be a powerful tool for developing quantitative summaries of individual studies as shown, for example, in a recent study of the economic value of higher education (Leslie and Brinkman 1988).

Interpretive inquiry refers to primary research that aims at making meaning of a particular or general behavior(s), event(s), or context(s) as a foundation for holistic understanding that reaches beyond mere facts. In so doing, it may not lead to generalization beyond the particular and the development of theory; even if it does not, however, it can nevertheless constitute generalized knowledge if it contributes to the depth—if not the breadth—of our understanding. While some quantitative techniques such as content analysis can be used

in interpretive inquiry, qualitative techniques are probably most appropriate for this kind of in-depth inquiry. Within the last decade, a growing number of field studies and case studies have been introduced into our literature, seeming to presage a greater emphasis on interpretive inquiry. From my perspective, however, many of these studies fall far short of markedly enhancing our understanding: straightforward narrative and description receive more attention than analysis, explanation, and interpretation. In short, there remains a gulf between qualitative research as a springboard to first-rate interpretive inquiry and the bulk of qualitative studies that have been conducted in higher education.

Finally, I have a strong sense that we need to encourage inquiry that is future-centered if we are to enlarge our scholarly aims. By future-centered I mean normative scholarship that imagines, idealizes, and speculates about the future of higher education. What, for example, should be the future of the comprehensive university, multi-campus systems, graduate education, the two-year college? At the present time, both scholars of higher education and our stakeholders give such topics little attention. To be sure, a few scholars have accentuated the value of "futures-research," and such studies may be a useful vehicle for thinking about the future. But it seems to me that we should begin to think broadly about initiating various kinds of normative inquiry regarding the future of higher education. There are traditions of philosophical inquiry, for example, that may be especially helpful for thinking about the future.

In summary, I believe strongly that we need to go beyond highly specialized knowledge to embrace inquiry that contributes to generalized knowledge. As conveyed far more eloquently in a quotation attributed to Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.:

> There are one-story intellects,
> Two-story intellects,
> And three-story intellects with skylights.
> All fact collectors who have
> No aims beyond their facts
> Are one-story men.
> Two-story men compare, reason,
> Generalize, using the labor of
> Fact Collectors as their own.
> Three-story men idealise,
> Imagine, predict—
> Their best illumination comes
> From above the skylight.

INQUIRY PARADIGM AND MODES OF INQUIRY

Prevailing Belief:

> *Inquiry in higher education should be guided by the positivist ideal of the natural and physical sciences and quantitative modes of inquiry.*

Our emphasis on specialized knowledge is, of course, closely connected to our philosophy of inquiry. Fundamental to this philosophy is the fact that we live in an age that worships science and within a social institution that celebrates a particular view of science—positivism—that has long been associated with inquiry in the natural and physical sciences. While a growing number of social scientists (Bellah et al. 1985) have questioned the appropriateness of both positivism and quantitative modes of inquiry in social science research, scholars in our field have continued to work out of a positivist paradigm as reflected—among other ways—in the emphasis we place on verification rather than discovery, on "objective, value-free" inquiry, and on quantitative studies and "analytic science" (Silverman 1982, 1987). (Although quantitative modes of inquiry are associated with positivism, I do not suggest that the two are coextensive. There are countless examples of qualitative studies that are positivistic in orientation.)

Critique and Conjecture

Having nested most of our inquiry within a traditional positivist paradigm, we can be justifiably proud of the many valuable empirical studies conducted by higher educationists. At the same time, however, it seems to me that inquiry in higher education has been unduly stifled by our commitment to the traditional positivist epistemology and quantitative modes of inquiry. The problem is that in our quest to be "scientific," to make a science of higher education, we have uncritically embraced the ontological and epistemological foundations of the positivist ideal and tended to emphasize quantitative techniques at the expense of qualitative modes of inquiry.

On the basis of my reading of and reflection on the pertinent literature in philosophy and the sciences, I have been persuaded that the traditional positivist paradigm is too narrow and inherently limiting. A major thread in twentieth-century science and philosophy has been the systematic undermining of this ideal (Phillips 1987; Rabinow and Sullivan 1979). In

our field, only Yvonna Lincoln has critically examined positivism in a series of publications (Lincoln 1988, 1989; Lincoln and Guba 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988) that have stimulated and sharpened my own thinking.

In particular, logical positivism and, to a lesser extent, Comtean positivism, have suffered a barrage of legitimate criticism, including the discrediting of the verifiability principle of meaning and the view that scientific knowledge is produced only from an objective observational base. To be sure, some closet Hempelians and unrepentant Comteans remain, and the critics of positivism have not approached agreement on what a "new philosophy of science" should entail. Nonetheless, the literature in the philosophy of science argues persuasively that the traditional positivist paradigm is inadequate (Bernstein 1983, 1985; Feyerabend 1978; Habermas 1971, 1984; Lakatos 1970; Phillips 1987).

It is long past time for scholars in our field to transcend the limits of a narrow positivism. For some, this means abandoning the positivist paradigm and substituting an alternative—a "post-positivist" (Schwartz and Ogilvy 1979) or "naturalistic" paradigm (Lincoln and Guba 1985). While sympathetic to these critics, I have some serious reservations. First, they are excessive in their "tenderness" and "charity"—their extreme relativism about what constitutes knowledge—and, in some cases, their rejection of scientific methods (Phillips 1987, 83–84). Second, there is a stridency and naiveté about their defense of an alternative paradigm that can be irritating. They tend to ignore the rich past of anthropology and sociology, such as the work of the Chicago School of Sociology, that stressed participant observation and fieldwork. Third, I am simply not persuaded that the Manichean, or "either-or" ("positivist" versus "naturalistic"), choice that has been introduced is as clear-cut as some critics suggest. For example, while Lincoln and Guba's (1985, 36–43) naturalistic paradigm is based on some meta-theoretical assumptions that contrast sharply with traditional positivism, many of the implications they draw for doing research are not at odds with positivist inquiry but rather reflect different emphases in knowledge creation—such as the need for research to be conducted in a natural setting.

What do I suggest? In objecting to a narrow-minded scientism, I do not think we should abandon the positivist paradigm. Rather, in the tradition of Campbell (1978) and Cronbach

(1975)—and informed in part by Lincoln and Guba (1985)—we should broaden our paradigm for inquiry. In a very preliminary way, let me suggest several principles that might guide a more broadly conceived paradigm:

1. Instead of assuming that there is a single "objective reality," we should explore the probability that there are "multiple constructed realities" (Berger and Luckmann 1973), though of course it does not necessarily follow that all constructions of reality are equally valid or powerful.

2. Instead of assuming that inquiry is "objective and value-free" because we have used objective methods, we should assume that inquiry is value-bound and that the researcher cannot be completely separated from "what is known" (Lincoln and Guba 1985, 37–38).

3. While we should seek to develop nomothetic knowledge in the form of generalizations free from both time and context, we must recognize that in many instances only time- and context-bound ideographic knowledge is possible, acknowledging the legitimacy and importance of this kind of knowledge.

4. Following Popper (1959), we should view inquiry as following a meandering course in which tentative "knowledge claims" are subject to ongoing criticism, refutation, and revision. All claims must be subject to "organized skepticism" (Merton 1973, 277). In light of these points of view, it follows that our inquiry should place major emphasis on research in natural settings, and on discovery as well as verification, inductive as well as deductive data analysis, purposive sampling as well as random sampling, qualitative as well as quantitative modes of inquiry, and emergent designs as well as fixed designs.

Turning specifically to modes of inquiry, I am clearly not suggesting that we jettison quantitative techniques of research. Rather, in light of the limitations of traditional positivism as well as specific limitations of quantification—including "reductionism" and "distortion of truth" (Hamilton 1976; Pascarella 1982; Popper 1968; Rist 1980)—we should recognize the legitimacy of qualitative ways of knowing within the context of a broadened inquiry paradigm.

There are at least four qualitative "traditions" (Jacob 1987, 1988) in the social sciences and the humanities that are especially appropriate for research in higher education. Although these are widely known, I mention them to draw attention to their possible applicability to research in higher

education. One such tradition, grounded theory, was developed by two sociologists (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Glaser 1978). It is a multi-faceted research strategy, which usually draws heavily on case study research that is designed to maximize flexibility in the generation of theory (Conrad 1982). Another qualitative method from sociology, symbolic interactionism (Denzin 1978; Ritzer 1983), has rarely been used in higher education research. Yet the processes involved in symbolic interaction—that is, how people take another's perspective and derive meaning in specific situations—may provide valuable tools for a holistic understanding of, for example, leadership behavior in higher education.

Still another qualitative method—ethnography—was developed initially by anthropologists. Ethnography (Sanday 1979) focuses on the study of culture within particular settings, and it is organized around extensive field observation and a range of qualitative data. Although it has been used by a small number of researchers in our field (London 1978), its possibilities for widespread use in higher education have scarcely been realized. Finally, from the humanities, I suggest a hermeneutic approach. Hermeneutics, an interpretative mode of inquiry, has been applied in curriculum studies at the secondary level. In higher education, it could be used to address problems in such areas as student development, curriculum, and evaluation.

INQUIRY PERSPECTIVES

Prevailing Belief:

> *Inquiry in higher education should be guided by a functionalist perspective rather than by non-traditional inquiry perspectives, for example, neo-Marxist or feminist.*

Just as we have sought to emulate the natural sciences through our commitment to a narrow positivism, so we have adopted a functionalist perspective from the natural sciences. Rooted originally in a model derived from the biological sciences and shaped by many sociologists and anthropologists over the last century, a functionalist perspective is one that has incorporated some diverse intellectual traditions: the structural-functionalism of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, the systems theory advanced by Parsons and Buckley, and

the conflict functionalism of Merton and Coser. Yet in spite of this diversity, this perspective maintains an underlying unity (Burrell and Morgan 1979), namely, that there is patterned order in social life and that the purpose of inquiry is thus to explain how and why various social phenomena affect social stability. More specifically, a functionalist perspective focuses on integration, strain, and crisis as well as systemic differentiation; and it views conflict as problematic, unnatural, or something to be resolved, rather than being inherent and structured. Although few in our field explicitly acknowledge it, most of the research in higher education has been shaped (wittingly or unwittingly) on the anvil of a functionalist framework—from the questions we pose, to our research designs, to the lens through which we interpret our findings.

Critique and Conjecture

As a young graduate student in political science and sociology, I spent countless hours in abstract discussion of the virtues and limitations of a functionalist perspective. Despite some misgivings, I, like nearly all of my peers in the field of higher education, eventually found myself conducting most of my research out of such a perspective. Today, however, I am concerned that our entrenched ideological commitment to a functionalist perspective excludes other frameworks at a high cost.

To begin with, we have become prisoners of a narrow, inherently conservative framework that has led us to focus on justifying and explaining the status quo in higher education. In turn, we have neglected to address critical and tough-minded questions about our colleges and universities. For example, most higher education researchers assume that there is pluralism and decentralization of power in American higher education and thus do not examine the question of whether there is a concentration of power in academe and, if so, the consequences of such a concentration for institutional governance and leadership, personnel, and academic programs. In my own area of curriculum research, higher education researchers assume that academic programs are shaped largely by factors internal to colleges and universities and therefore do not consider the extent to which the political economy in general and individual benefactors in particular—foundations, corporations, federal and state government—affect curriculum.

The functionalist perspective not only has limited the kinds of research questions asked, it has also blinded us to the viewpoints of many of our stakeholders. As Robert Merton has noted, "the concept of function involves the standpoint of the observer, not necessarily that of the participant" (1968, 7). In other words, most researchers in our field take the viewpoint of the observer and observe what they think is important, not what the observed may think is salient. By separating the "researcher" from the "researched," we have isolated ourselves from the voices of many of the participants and stakeholders in higher education that we are studying—including women, students in general, persons of color, and people from a full range of ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Like other perspectives, a functionalist perspective is not neutral, and this orientation has almost always insulated our research designs and our data analysis and interpretation from the "reality constructions" of many of our stakeholders.

Without rejecting a functionalist perspective and with a full realization that "pluralism itself is a form of ideology" (Lincoln 1988, 14), I urge my colleagues to consider using alternative perspectives in the conduct of their inquiry. We all know that a variety of intellectual currents cut across such fields as philosophy, literature, political sociology, and history, providing the impetus and underpinnings for a growing number of alternative inquiry perspectives. These perspectives include critical, radical humanist, deconstructionist, feminist, neo-Marxist, realist, and radical structuralist (Bernstein 1983; Habermas 1971; Burrell and Morgan 1979). Each of these perspectives merits consideration; though as with any perspective, each should be considered with a full awareness of the limitations of narrowly partisan views.

At least partly because they respond to my stated reservations about a functionalist perspective, I would especially like to draw attention to two of these perspectives—one rooted in the nineteenth century, the other in the twentieth. The first, a neo-Marxist perspective, has been widely used by a growing number of scholars in the social sciences, the humanities, and the professions (Ollman and Vernoff 1982). The possibilities of such a framework to illuminate the study of higher education are splendidly illustrated in a new book on university-industry partnerships and the development of higher education policy. In a richly textured case study of the Business Higher Education Forum, Sheila Slaughter (1989) uses a neo-

Marxist framework to analyze relations between changes in the political economy—as filtered through class, the state, and knowledge (ideology)—and the shaping of business/ university alliances, science policy, and higher learning.

The second perspective—a feminist perspective—has been propelled by the contemporary women's movement. It informs an outpouring of feminist scholarship and reflects so many themes and voices—sometimes conflicting and contradictory—that it defies easy definition. While the academy has been reluctant to accept feminist scholarship, surely only the most curmudgeonly and sexist among us would question the assertion that a growing body of first-class scholarship in recent years has been guided by feminist persuasions (DuBois et al. 1985; Ferguson 1984; E. Keller 1985). Though examples in our field of research based largely on a feminist perspective are few, there are encouraging signs. Patricia Gumport's (1987) study of the emergence of feminist scholarship nicely illuminates the interacting processes by which this new field has gained legitimacy and become institutionalized in American higher education.

This discussion of inquiry perspectives can be aptly summarized with a quotation attributed to Jose Ortega y Gasset: "Reality happens to be, like a landscape possessed of an infinite number of perspectives, all equally veracious and authentic. The sole false perspective is that which claims to be the only one there is."

BEYOND IDEOLOGICAL HEGEMONY: A VISION OF COMMUNITY

As students of higher education, many of us have been guided by a dominant ideology regarding the generation and dissemination of knowledge in our field. I have grown uneasy about our seemingly uncritical acceptance of that ideology while, at the same time, I am skeptical of those who would substitute one orthodoxy for another. Yet because inquiry is at the heart of our community, I would like to conclude by suggesting some basic tenets to guide inquiry in our community of scholars:

- We should view higher education not as a narrow academic discipline but as a field of study in which the needs of our major stakeholders—scholarly peers, ad-

ministrators and faculty, public policy-makers, and the educated public—provide the touchstone for inquiry. Within the context of a stakeholder-centered model of inquiry, we especially need to develop research agendas that are more responsive to our stakeholders, introduce new approaches to disseminating our research findings, produce generalized as well as specialized knowledge, broaden our inquiry paradigm and ways of knowing, and utilize nontraditional inquiry perspectives.

● Instead of reifying highly specialized knowledge at the expense of generalized knowledge—much less pitting one against the other—we should elevate the importance of generalized knowledge and encourage four general approaches to inquiry consonant with that end: problem-centered, integrative, interpretive, and future-centered.

● Without diminishing the contribution of our traditional research paradigm and quantitative modes of inquiry, we should more forthrightly acknowledge the limitations of the positivist paradigm and associated ways of knowing. In turn, we need to broaden our inquiry paradigm and draw on qualitative approaches from the humanities and social sciences—such as grounded theory, ethnography, symbolic interactionism, and hermeneutics.

● We should acknowledge the limitations of a functionalist perspective and, in turn, draw more heavily upon other inquiry perspectives used in the social sciences and humanities such as neo-Marxist and feminist perspectives.

In closing, I look forward to participation in a community that is more responsive to and valued by its stakeholders—indeed, a community held together by a shared commitment to its various stakeholders—more invitational and catholic about its research aims and agendas, more introspective about the strengths and limitations of its positivistic heritage, more open to the possibilities of alternative perspectives and ways of knowing as well as the diverse voices of scholars in other disciplines and fields. Perhaps most important, I look forward to a community more willing to engage in ongoing critique and conjecture about inquiry in higher education. For many of us, relaxing our grip on our ideological heritage will not come easy. But I have a strong conviction that our growth and maturity as a field—and as individuals—demand it.

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