

relationship (and promptly had their study attacked as inadequately done, false, and stupid by those whose values and common sense objected to their findings). If policy is made based not upon solid research but upon the obvious, taxpayer money will often be wasted, successful alternatives not chosen, and the problem left unattended or exacerbated. Arguing for a scientific methodology, Hagan (2006, p. 5) is persuasive:

verbal description of phenomena are not much different than numerical measures of some entity; the latter simply force the analyst to be more precise and rigorous, while thinking through the concept under study in a more disciplined manner. Thus, common sense and the experience certainly serve an important function in sensitizing us to a subject; however, our separate experiences might better be viewed as limited case studies of a subject matter that may not be entirely generalizable to the universe of such subjects, or as observations that may be limited by time, place, and the subjective biases of the observer.

Almost everyone favors solid research, a rigorous and disciplined analysis, and striving to reduce bias and enhance objectivity. But your authors believe that is simply not enough. The words we have acquired and arranged, the stories we tell and believe, demand more. You are given the opportunity to test the usefulness of this chapter's concepts yourself and to reflect critically about postmodern problem definition in the case that closes this chapter.

Glossary Terms

epistemology (p. 213)

synecdoches (p. 235)

Case Study: School Shootings and Focus Group Research: Narrative Analysis and Problem Definition

The Case

Read the following transcript and be prepared to answer questions. Please note that this transcript is fictional, although it was based on an analysis of multiple sources revealing how individuals frame the issue during discussions.

A focus group researcher was interested in finding out the views of parents of schoolchildren toward the recent school shootings. The focus group researcher arranged for 12 parents to show up at 7:00 p.m. to discuss the shootings. Only nine parents actually arrived at the school cafeteria for the session. Due to scheduling problems, the focus group lasted for only one hour. After introductions, the discussion began and the following transcript has been produced.

Focus Group Transcript

7:00 P.M.

FACILITATOR (F): Question: "What are your thoughts on the recent school shootings?"

PARTICIPANT #1 (P1): I believe that the media really glorifies these events and that basically we have these kids who are looking at trying to make a name for themselves by doing these horrible things. I couldn't believe how much coverage the shooting in Oregon received.

(continued)