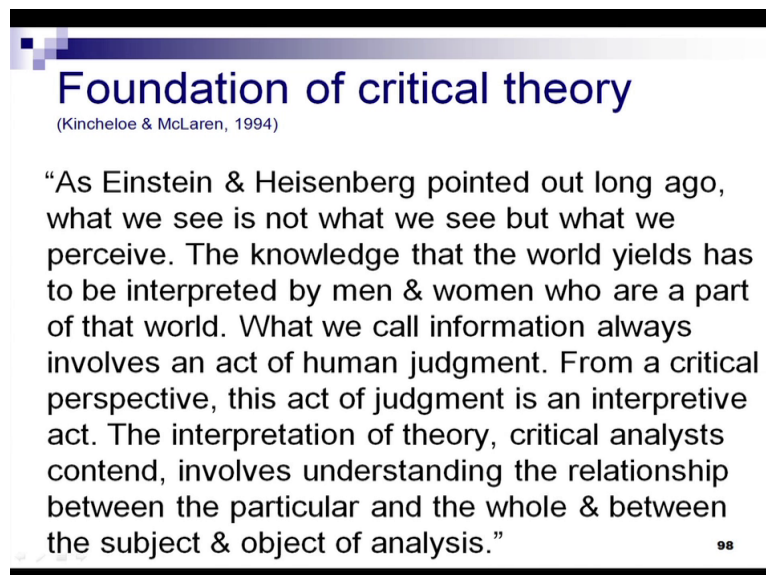


Qualitative Research Methods
Assistant Prof. Aradhna Malik
Vinod Gupta School of Management
Indian Institute of Technology - Kharagpur

Lecture 14
Characteristics of Critical Theory

Welcome back to the course title qualitative research methods, my name is Aradhna Malik and I am helping you with this course and we have been discussing critical theory, we discussed what critical theory was, now we will move in, move on to the characteristics of critical theory, this lecture will be focusing on the characteristics of critical theory, okay, so the foundation of critical theory, I am going to read a paragraph from an article from Kincheloe and McLaren.

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That was part of the handbook of qualitative research methods by Denzin and Lincoln, as Einstein and Heisenberg pointed out long ago, what we see is not what we see, but what we perceive. What we perceive, what we make out of that situation, the knowledge that the world yields to be interpreted by men and women who are a part of that world. What we call information always involves an act of human judgment.

So what we are interpreting is based on our judgment of that situation, the knowledge that we gain from the world excuse me has to be interpreted by men and women by people, who are a part of that world. So what is true? What is real? Is always going to be relative it is going to be dependent on the person who is coming up or who is giving us interpretation, who is

giving us the notion of a real and true. From a critical perspective this act of judgment is an interpretive act.

The interpretation of theory, critical analysts contend, involved understanding the relationship between the particular and the whole and between the subject and object of analysis. Again you know this is being repeated time and again, that critical theory is focusing on the relationship between the subject and the object the observer and the observed.

So the interpretation of theory involves understanding this relationship between the observer and the observed and how this relationship defines the quality of inquiry that is being conducted or how it defines, or how it determines or how, what is taken out of the inquiry or what is understood from the inquiry that is characteristics of critical theory.

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Characteristics of critical theory

(Guba & Lincoln, 1994)

- **Ontology** (what is studied or believed):
Historical realism: Challenging contextually and reflexively 'realized' meanings of historical 'facts' and 'truths'
- **Epistemology** (why & how do we know what we know): Transactional & subjectivist: "What can be known is inextricably intertwined with the interaction between a *particular* investigator and a *particular* object or group."

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Characteristics of Critical theory, the first characteristic critical theory, again this is a paper by Guba and Lincoln in the handbook of qualitative research methods, by then edited by Denzin and Lincoln, so I will give you the complete Reference, Ontology or what is studied believed, in this case it is historical realism, challenging contextually and reflexively realized meanings of historical facts and truths.

So when we talk about critical theory we are talking about accepting that phenomenon, that the knowledge that has been found to be real and true, has been arrived at through a reflexive process, through a process of going back and forth, through a process of challenging the contexts or challenging the reasons for using, the reasoning that was used or challenging the,

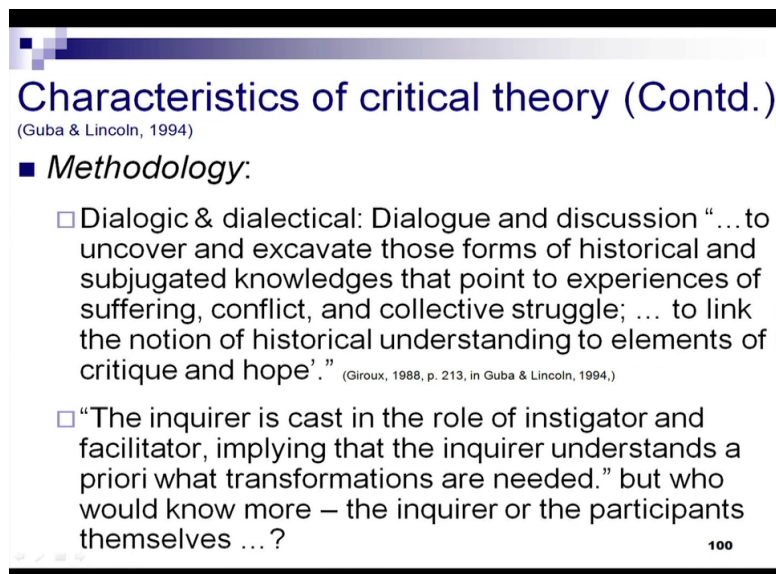
sorry, challenging the process of arriving at the meaning that has been arrived at historically and you know and accepting that the processes was thorough and complete.

Historical realism, the what is studied the phenomenon, you know somebody has, we have to draw line somewhere, I am going to study phenomenon A, so my understanding of phenomenon A, its current state or its current understanding has been derived historically through this going back and forth, between ideas and real definition are more widely accepted understanding of what is going to be studied has already been arrived at, so that is the ontology, that is how we define, what we study or what I believe.

Then epistemology why and how do we know what we know that is epistemology. So epistemology in this case is transactional and subjectivist, I know what I know because enough conversation has taken place about it, transaction, interaction regarding the object of study has happened and it has been subjectively interpreted.

What can be known as inexplicably intertwined with the interaction between a particular investigator and a particular object or group. In saying so we are bringing to the fore that the characteristics of the investigator and the characteristics of the investigated are both contributing, to how the interaction between the investigator and investigated takes place, to how the interaction between the observer and observed takes place, okay.

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Characteristics of critical theory (Contd.)
(Guba & Lincoln, 1994)

- **Methodology:**
 - Dialogic & dialectical: Dialogue and discussion "... to uncover and excavate those forms of historical and subjugated knowledges that point to experiences of suffering, conflict, and collective struggle; ... to link the notion of historical understanding to elements of critique and hope'." (Giroux, 1988, p. 213, in Guba & Lincoln, 1994.)
 - "The inquirer is cast in the role of instigator and facilitator, implying that the inquirer understands a priori what transformations are needed." but who would know more – the inquirer or the participants themselves ... ?

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Then methodology, methodology is dialogic and dialectical, there is dialogue and discussion "to uncover and excavate those forms of historical and subjugated knowledges that point to

experiences of suffering, conflict, and collective struggle; to link the notion of historical understanding to elements of critique and hope.” Why would we challenge something that is believed to be true, only when we find wrong with it, something is not right, so something still need to be probed further.

So critical theory, typically deals with the subjects oppression, in the or subjects of, you know unfairness, putting very, very crudely, very simply critical theory questions phenomena that surface has been un-faired and for the sole purpose of finding out why these unfairness even happened, for the purpose of finding out where these unfairness came from and redrafting, recreating that understanding in such way, that these unfairness evolves to a message of hope.

So the methodology here is dialogic, dialogue takes place between the observer and the observed and dialectical discussions takes place on opposing values with the sole of idea of arriving at a meaning, that is going to be beneficial, that is going to help levitate the current situation or the interpretation of the current situation, so it becomes comfortable, I am putting this very, very simply and its quiet lightly that people may disagree that, what I am saying, but that is the way I understand this.

“The inquirer is cast in the role of instigator and facilitator, implying that the inquirer understands a priori what transformations are needed.” But who would know more – inquirer or the participants themselves? So we are talking about critical theory, we are talking about uprooting the held beliefs what is right? What is wrong? What is acceptable? What is not acceptable? How things should and should not be done?

In the hope that the person uprooting these notions, with the assumption that the person uprooting these notions, understands what to do after these notions have been uprooted. So that is the underlying assumption, the inquirer is cast in the role of the instigator, one you are poking and prodding and you are saying why this? Why not by this? Why this? Why not this? You know my student, one of my students, asked me a question yesterday.

And she said Maam, whenever we are referring to a child; I was giving some example of how children learn to socialize in new environments. And I used that example to describe, how organizations evolved and she said Maam, you used the example and you said you referred to the child as she, whereas in most literature children are referred to as he, why is this? Can this

be a subject of inquiry has this already been a subject of inquiry and I was quite intrigued and I was quite impressed by this girl, because she wanted to know ma'am, why are we doing this.

The another student was asked me that you know, it is it is a common notion, common understanding that in all these forms that we need to fill up for, you know whenever we have to give out personal information for some weird odd reason, the marital status of the woman needs to be listed, it is either Miss or Mrs. But the marital status of men never needs to be revealed on all of these forms, is this and both of the students asked me if these kinds of discourses, are these kinds of behavior areas were indicative of a patriarchal society.

You see the amount of inside our students have into these issues, so questioning why, because somebody, because and both of these questions asked by women, both the students who ask me these things were women, they were not man so it is hurting them personally somewhere, somewhere something is striking a cord and I'm not saying that all men are going to be unfair but asking why the system developed, why the system took shape they did, is the method we use in, when we use critical theory, when we talk about critical theory.

So what are all these rooted in, what are the historical background, that there is a rooted in somebody is suffering, somebody is uncomfortable, somebody says that something isn't unfair and inquiry from the paradigm of critical theory would essentially necessitate, that a some action be taken, after one has found out why these things happen, okay, so the inquirer and cast into the role of instigator, so the enquirer is poking and prodding why? Why? Why? Why do we have to write a Miss and Mrs. but not Mr. and or married Mr.? Etc.,

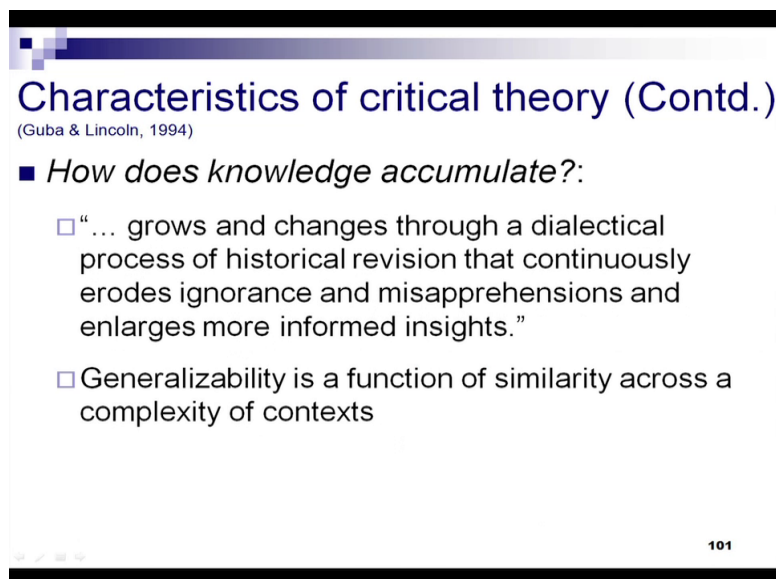
And facilitator I will find out why this is happening and if I cannot discover any logical reason for why women's marital status needs to be revealed on the forms, for you know, on the travel documents, on the passport, on the documents that one has to fill out, on the hospital form is wherever, once I have found that out if I can't find the logical reason for it, I will share this understanding with somebody who can do something about it.

So facilitator first find out and then you facilitate the evolution of the knowledge base, you facilitate an addition to the way things are done in such a way, that whatever was seeming as an fair doesn't seem unfair anymore, so we change things. But who would know more? Who would know more? The inquirer or the observed that is the criticism of this, who is going to

know more about the situation and the transformations that are required in the situation, would it be a person who is conducting an inquiry into it or would it be a person who is actually going through it.

And this was the topic of discussion in the course that I thought through the mover portal before this and that was sustainable development. Who knows more about what kind of development is required, the people in the situation or the people coming with fancy expertise from outside the situation? Who is going to know more?

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Characteristics of critical theory (Contd.)
(Guba & Lincoln, 1994)

■ *How does knowledge accumulate?:*

- "... grows and changes through a dialectical process of historical revision that continuously erodes ignorance and misapprehensions and enlarges more informed insights."
- Generalizability is a function of similarity across a complexity of contexts

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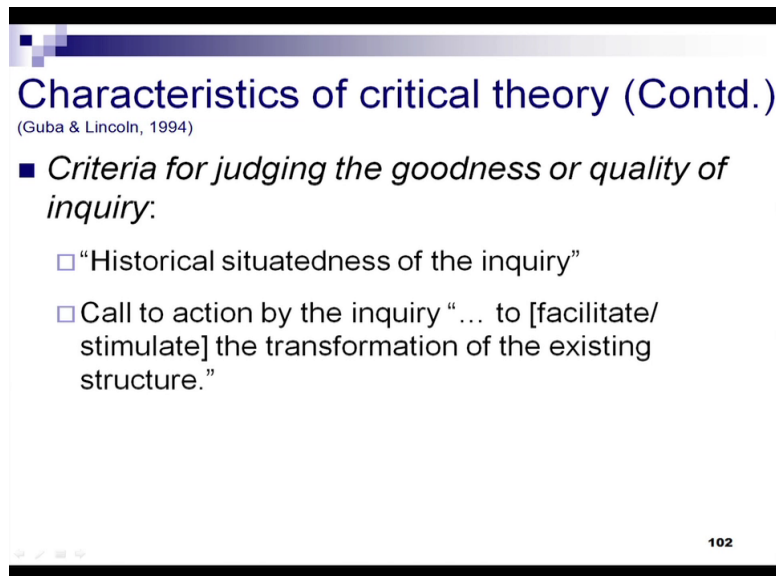
How does knowledge accumulate? In critical theory knowledge "grows and changes through a dialectical process of historical revision that continuously erodes ignorance and misapprehensions and enlarge is more informed insights." In one of the previous years I told you that we conduct qualitative research, when we add knowledge to the knowledge base, the knowledge that is added is found to be or is perceived to be complete the addition of knowledge is perceived to be complete, only when the boundary between the new knowledge and the old knowledge starts getting blurred.

You don't know where, what you know, when did and what you have just added to the knowledge base has started so when the new knowledge becomes a integral part of the old knowledge base, then only, then can be understand it to be a meaningful and or worth our time or worth in being probed into, so when we say how does knowledge accumulate, we are trying to where knowledge accumulate, by way of adding to the existing knowledge base in such a way that these lines between the old and new are blurred.

By fitting into the old knowledge base in such a way that it seems like an extension of the existing knowledge base, through historical revision, through ensuring that ignorance, you know does not find a place in this inquiry, through calling out the misapprehension, through enlarging the currently formed insights.

Generalizability when we talk about knowledge accumulation, generalizability our ability to generalize is a function of similarity across the complexity of contexts, so we don't say that okay, you know what is true in this situation will be true, the other situation, unless we can draw parallels between the complexity of contexts that the situation that is being observed in the phenomenon, that is being observed in, as with whatever we are comparing it too, we cannot say that these two phenomena are generalizable. So generalizability becomes is function of the similarity between the complexity of contexts.

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Characteristics of critical theory (Contd.)
(Guba & Lincoln, 1994)

- *Criteria for judging the goodness or quality of inquiry:*
 - “Historical situatedness of the inquiry”
 - Call to action by the inquiry “... to [facilitate/ stimulate] the transformation of the existing structure.”

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The criteria for judging the quality of inquiry are, number one “the historical situatedness of the inquiry.” What was happening before it, how will it be connected to what will come after it, where is it situated historically within the ongoing dynamic value of things. The second aspect that helps us judge the goodness of the quality of inquiry is the call to action by the inquiry.

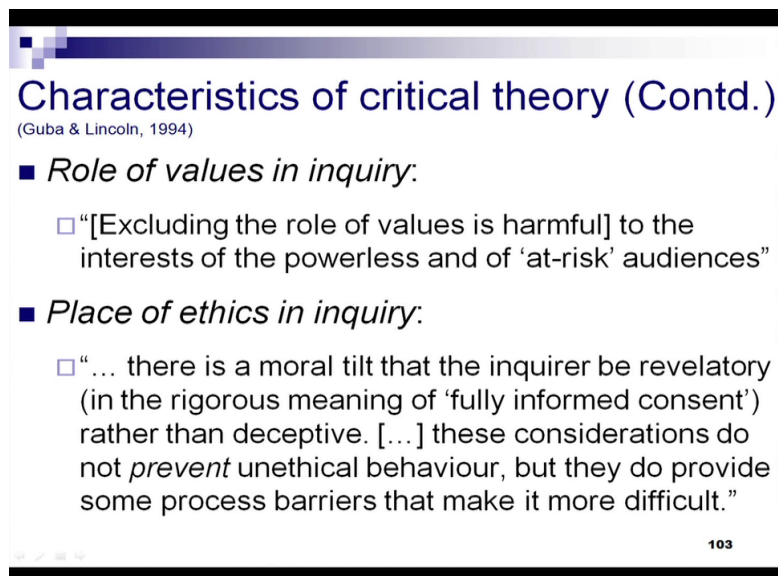
We not inquiring into something for the sake of inquiring into it, we want to do something about it, I want to find out why the marital status of women find the place on all these forms but the marital status men does not, for the purpose of either adding that column or removing

the 'Miss's' tab from the forms, so that unmarried, separated, divorced women do not feel uncomfortable and a sense of fairness is achieved in the social fabric we are part of.

So unless I have that in mind maybe it is not, you know it will whatever I am trying to study will not have much of meaning, will not have value, it will have meaning, it will just not be considered valuable in the scheme of things. Okay, so I am finding out something for the purpose of doing something about it and we call this action research, you know we conduct research for the purpose of adding to the society that it can or adding to the situation to the context it can be applied to.

So call to action by the inquiry to facilitate or stimulate the transformation of the existing structure, you want to find out something, so we can transform the structure that we are trying to inquire into for the betterment of all involved.

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Characteristics of critical theory (Contd.)
(Guba & Lincoln, 1994)

- *Role of values in inquiry:*
 - “[Excluding the role of values is harmful] to the interests of the powerless and of ‘at-risk’ audiences”
- *Place of ethics in inquiry:*
 - “... there is a moral tilt that the inquirer be revelatory (in the rigorous meaning of ‘fully informed consent’) rather than deceptive. [...] these considerations do not *prevent* unethical behaviour, but they do provide some process barriers that make it more difficult.”

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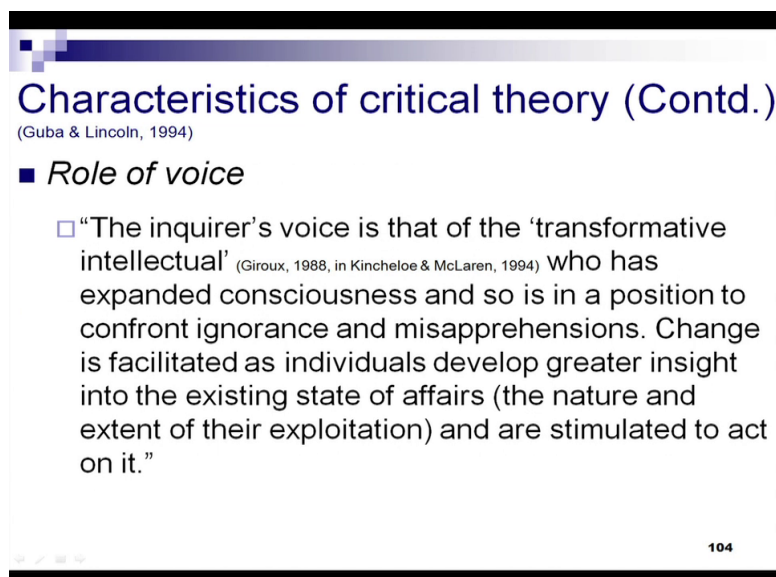
Role of values and values become a part of inquiries from a critical theory perspective, from a critical within the critical theory paradigm, values become very, very important and “excluding the role of values becomes harmful to the interest of the powerless and of at risk audiences.” So values shaped with inquiry is conducted, what is good? What should be done? what is required to be done for the betterment of the human condition becomes a guiding factor in the way the inquiry is conducted.

Place of ethics in inquiry “there is moral tilt that the inquirer the revelatory in the rigorous meaning of fully informed consent rather than deceptive.” You are not trying to deceive

anyone we inform the inquirer that they are being inquired into, we inform the observed that they are being observed and we base our inquiry, the methods are based on fully informed consent, we tell them that we are going to be observing them and only when they say yes you can observe us, do we go into the situation and observe whoever it is that you're trying to observe.

These considerations do not prevent unethical behavior but they do provide some process barriers that make unethical behavior more difficult, so when we lay everything in out, you know in black and white, the chances of us becoming unethical or indulging in unethical behavior are considerable reduced. So we try our best to be as clear as transparent as possible, so there is ethics becomes a guiding force for the inquiry, values that are held by the inquiry and inquired also shaped the way the inquiry and way the inquiry takes place.

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Characteristics of critical theory (Contd.)
(Guba & Lincoln, 1994)

- *Role of voice*
 - "The inquirer's voice is that of the 'transformative intellectual' (Giroux, 1988, in Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994) who has expanded consciousness and so is in a position to confront ignorance and misapprehensions. Change is facilitated as individuals develop greater insight into the existing state of affairs (the nature and extent of their exploitation) and are stimulated to act on it."

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Role of voice, The inquirer's voice is that of the transformative individual intellectual who has expanded consciousness and so is in a position to confront ignorance and misapprehensions." So the voice, the mindset that the inquirer brings to the table is a transformative mind set, I'm going in, I will find out more about the situation and I will do something about it, so that the human condition is alleviated, human condition become a better.

The condition of all the human beings involved in the situation becomes better, fairer, more bearable, Etc., Who has expanded consciousness and so is in a position to confront ignorance and misapprehensions. So the inquirer, when we say voice we are talking about the role the

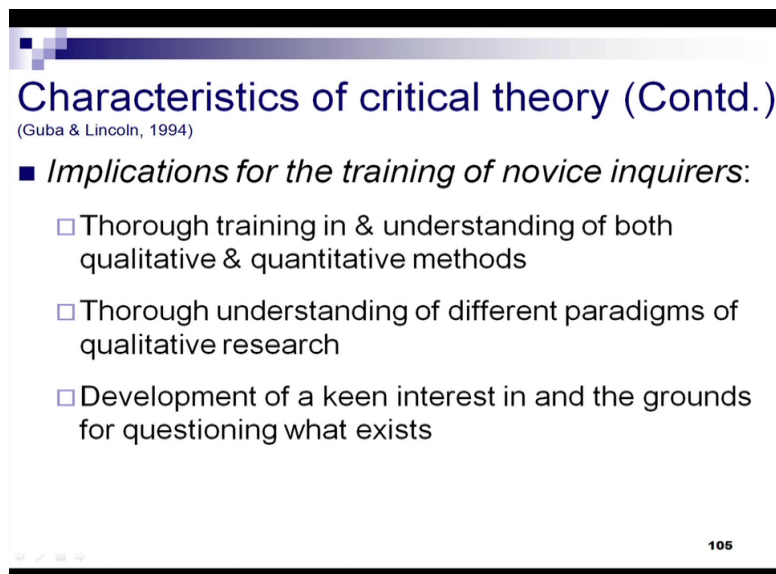
inquirer has the role of going in as a person who is willing to acknowledge, misapprehensions, who has the courage to confront ignorance and say this is where one needs to know more before arriving at a decision, before you know coming to, or before arriving at or before driving a meaning from the situation.

And who is, who has expanded consciousness, who is open to ideas, who is open to receiving different perspectives and combining this perspectives and then helping develop a more thorough and more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon that is being studied. “Change is facilitated as individuals develop greater insight into the existing state of affairs the nature and extent of their exploitation and are stimulated to act on it.”

So the inquired are also made aware of the situation, they are help to accept their situation and their action in coming out of the difficult situation is facilitated by the inquirer and that is the voice that the inquirer has, I am here to help you, I will understand, I am coming with an open mind, I would like to understand what is going on, I have the courage to point out what is unfair, what should and should not be done.

I also have the knowledge a thorough understanding to be able to point out what should and should not be done. And I am in a position to facilitate your, coming out of that situation or your making that situation better for yourself that is the voice of the inquirer.

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Characteristics of critical theory (Contd.)
(Guba & Lincoln, 1994)

- *Implications for the training of novice inquirers:*
 - Thorough training in & understanding of both qualitative & quantitative methods
 - Thorough understanding of different paradigms of qualitative research
 - Development of a keen interest in and the grounds for questioning what exists

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Now what are the implications of critical theory, the implications for training of novice inquirers in critical theory? Critical theory is very difficult, we are talking about challenging

everything, we are talking about breaking everything, we are talking about reconstructing everything, but what do we need to know? What do we need to have? in order to really conduct inquiry from a critical perspective.

The first thing and the most important thing that we need to have a thorough training in and understanding of both qualitative and quantitative methods. We need to know what we are dealing with, we need to know what is out there, not only qualitative research, we also need to fully, thoroughly understand, clearly understand quantitative methods, because till we know what's out there we can't question it. So we need to have a thorough understanding of it and an in-depth training in it.

Thorough understanding of different paradigms of qualitative research, critical theory is the last stage, where we say okay, this is not right, this is not right, this is not right, this needs to be changed and here is why, this needs to be changed and here is why, but till we know what exists and how it shapes things and how it shapes the mindset of people and why and where the gaps are, how will be questioned it.

So in order to question something we first need to have a thorough understanding of it. We need to understand the mindsets that inquirers bring to the table, we need to understand the mindset that we that people, that different people are coming with, that different people are working in and only then can we say okay, this maybe looked at in this manner. Then the development of a keen interest in and the grounds for questioning what exists.

So one has to be thoroughly involved in the research one is conducting, one has to be thoroughly involved in the process of inquiry, one cannot go in from the perspective of a disinterested inquirer, one has to be thoroughly involved in tangled with what is being inquired and one has to have the courage to face off, to things that one feels can be changed and questioned.

So it is courage, it is knowledge, it is the energy, all of these things have to come together, only then can one really and truly approach anything from the critical stand point. So I think that is all we have time for in this lecture, in the next lecture we will wrap up the discussion on critical theory, thank you very much for listening.