The Reconciliation of Humanism and Positivism in the Practice of Consumer Research: A View from the Trenches

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Consumer researchers commonly assert that humanism differs from positivism (what is referred to here as naturalism) on a number of dimensions. However, it is shown here that once terminological differences and methodological similarities are recognized, the remaining differences between humanism and naturalism within consumer research are few. While arguments persist at the philosophical extremes, it appears that practicing researchers have achieved considerable reconciliation.

...history shows that the experimental results were first thought to be valid, then believed to be an instrumental artifact, then again thought to be correct, then believed again to be an artifact, and are currently thought to be correct. The interpretation and validation of experimental results is not a simple task.

(Franklin 1990, p. 4)

I doubt that any anthropologist wants to say of his chief informants, "inarticulate but honest." Thus although I managed to avoid the most obvious liars in the community, it was never possible nor in my best interest to avoid the most accomplished ones; for the most accomplished liars are also sometimes the most accomplished truth tellers... Ultimately, I suspect, ethnography is an act of faith and a record, among other things, of the human vulnerabilities of ethnographers themselves.

(Nachman 1984, p. 536)

There has been considerable debate in recent years over the philosophies and methods that should guide consumer research. Much of the conflict surrounds the relative merits of what researchers have dubbed positivism and humanism. Although turbulent, the conflict offers a unique opportunity to study and integrate the theories, methods, and philosophies of various disciplines. Nonetheless, prior work in consumer research has generally judged the two approaches to be irreconcilable (e.g., Hirschman 1986; for one exception see Hunt 1989).

This article reconsiders the purported differences between humanism and what is generally called positivism. In contrast to prior conclusions of irreconcilability, it is argued (1) that many of the purported differences are merely terminological in nature, and (2) that studies from the two camps share many practices. From this perspective, the purported differences between humanism and positivism comprise a needlessly divisive facade.

TERMINOLOGY AND OVERVIEW

Various authors have noted that the term positivism is often misapplied to research that is not positivistic (Bhaskar 1979; Hunt 1991; Rosenberg 1988). For example, researchers routinely pit "positivism's" causal approach against humanism's noncausal approach (Hirschman 1986; Holbrook and O'Shaughnessy 1988; Hudson and Ozanne 1988; Lincoln and Guba 1985; Ozanne and Hudson 1989). However, Hunt's (1991) historical analysis reveals that positivism and its derivatives eschew causation and focus instead on prediction. The danger is that misapplications of the label positivism might lead readers to prematurely reject nonpositivistic approaches.

To avoid confusion, a label other than positivism will be used here to represent the positions against which humanists compare themselves. These nonhumanist positions generally advocate the use of either experimental or statistical controls (cf. Anderson's 1986 list of positivistic research programs). Although any number of terms might be con-

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sidered (empiricism, experimentalism, etc.), Bhaskar’s (1979) naturalism is adopted here. Naturalism refers to the belief that methods of the natural sciences are appropriate for the social sciences. That naturalism is what humanist consumer researchers generally mean by the term positivism is evidenced in the following statement of two researchers comparing humanism and “positivism”:

The dominant paradigm within consumer research is positivism . . . Generally, consumer researchers apply the methods of the natural sciences to the study of social beings. (Ozanne and Hudson 1989, p. 1)

The present article reevaluates the positivist/humanist comparisons from prior research, but replaces the term positivism with the more apt term naturalism (readers are cautioned not to confuse naturalism, a philosophy of science, with naturalistic observation, a popular method in the social sciences).

As summarized in Table 1, researchers have suggested a number of fundamental differences between humanism and naturalism that are thought to preclude their reconciliation (Hirschman 1986; Holbrook and O’Shaughnessy 1988; Hudson and Ozanne 1988; Lincoln and Guba 1985; Lutz 1989; Ozanne and Hudson 1989). The current discussion examines each dimension carefully. It is argued that humanist features pervade naturalist research while naturalist features pervade humanist research. Despite battles waged at the philosophical extremes (e.g., Sternthal, Tybout, and Calder 1987), research practice has adopted a middle ground consisting of what will be referred to here as liberal naturalism and conservative humanism.

The terms liberal naturalism and conservative humanism refer to the positions and methods typically evidenced in the practice of naturalist and humanist research. These positions fall between the extremes of doctrinaire naturalism and doctrinaire humanism (Table 1 also summarizes the extremes). Like conservative democrats and liberal republicans, conservative humanists and liberal naturalists are far more similar than different. For example, whereas doctrinaire naturalism professes a deterministic rather than voluntaristic view of human behavior, more liberal practitioners of naturalism see human behavior as having both deterministic and voluntaristic components (Hunt 1989, 1991; Rosenberg 1988).

The following discussion addresses each of the purported humanism/naturalism differences in Table 1. Although a few genuine differences exist, it is argued that their number has been exaggerated in the past by failures to recognize (1) terminological differences, and (2) methodological similarities. To some extent, prior comparisons have been between extremist doctrines more so than between the moderate versions evidenced in research practice (cf. Hunt 1989).

ONTIOLOGICAL ISSUES

Single vs. Multiple Realities

It is often said that naturalist researchers assume a single reality while humanists assume multiple realities constructed by the perceiver. However, the difference is largely one of semantics as evident in the example of Schrodinger’s cat (Zukav 1979). Assume that a cat is placed out of sight in a box, and that the box is connected to a device capable of releasing a deadly gas. Whether the gas is released or not depends on some random event occurring at midnight. The question is whether the cat is dead or alive after midnight. Doctrinaire naturalism might maintain that there is but one reality: Either the cat is dead or alive. We will not know which until we open the box. However, another interpretation is that the fate of the cat is not decided until the box is opened. Until then, there are two realities.

In the case of Schrodinger’s cat, there is a correspondence between the humanists’ phrase multiple realities and the naturalists’ phrase multiple interpretations or multiple possibilities. In research practice, naturalism commonly acknowledges the viability of multiple interpretations. For example, naturalist researchers develop and test different interpretations of their findings (e.g., Allen and Madden 1985), reinterpret the data of others (e.g., Russo 1974), use multiple judges to interpret qualitative data (e.g., MacKenzie, Lutz, and Belch 1986), and interpret their findings in ways that are acceptable to their respective scientific communities (e.g., McCloskey 1983). Interpretation is an important part of experimentation (see Franklin 1990; Holbrook and O’Shaughnessy 1988).

The only difference is that, unlike naturalist researchers, humanists do not believe there is a single reality awaiting discovery. But this difference is not substantive in research practice where the following two conditions hold: (1) liberal naturalists recognize the possibility of multiple and valid interpretations (realities), and (2) in their dependability criterion (which is discussed later), conservative humanists recognize that some realities (interpretations) are likely to be more valid than others. Thus, the conflict over the singleness of reality has no bearing on the conduct or interpretation of research.

The Gestalt vs. Elementarism

In attacking the introspectionist methods of the 19th-century structuralists, gestalt psychologists made the following observation: The whole is more than the sum of its parts. Humanists invoke this fact to justify a focus on the gestalt and to differentiate themselves from naturalist researchers who purportedly study elements.

However, elementarists such as naturalists agree that the whole is more than the sum of its parts. It is the interaction of the parts, whether additive or not, that determines the whole. Instead of being less interested in the gestalt, naturalism tries to understand the gestalt by examining the interactions among elements.

There are, however, three gestalt-related issues on which humanism and naturalism might differ: (1) the independence of parts and wholes, (2) the futility of analyzing parts, and (3) the fragmentability of gestalts. As discussed next, these differences are superficial, especially when considering the relativity of the term gestalt.

Part-Whole Independence

Water’s freezing point is quite different from that of its oxygen and hydrogen elements. Such emergent properties
## TABLE 1
Variations of Naturalism and Humanism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Doctrinaire Naturalism</th>
<th>Liberal Naturalism</th>
<th>Conservative Humanism</th>
<th>Doctrinaire Humanism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. One reality exists that is knowable with certainty.</td>
<td>1. One reality exists with multiple interpretations, but all are not equally valid.</td>
<td>1. Multiple realities exist, but all are not equally valid.</td>
<td>1. Multiple realities exist, all of which are equally valid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Explanatory, usually in terms of unidirectional causality.</td>
<td>4. Descriptive, explanatory, and/or causal. Causality can be isolated, even if probabilistically, and multi-directional causality is addressed.</td>
<td>4. Descriptive, explanatory, and/or causal. Focus on simultaneous shaping, but unidirectional causality is sometimes addressed.</td>
<td>4. Descriptive, especially &quot;thick&quot; description.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Conclusions are context-free.</td>
<td>5. Conclusions can be relatively context free, but contextual contingencies and boundary conditions are important.</td>
<td>5. Conclusions are relatively context bound, but transferability is possible and important.</td>
<td>5. Conclusions are context-bound.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Researcher and phenomenon are independent.</td>
<td>6. Researcher and phenomenon sometimes interact, but method can reduce researcher effects.</td>
<td>6. Researcher and phenomenon always interact, but method can reduce researcher effects.</td>
<td>6. Researcher and phenomenon always interact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Inquiry is value-free.</td>
<td>7. Inquiry is influenced by values.</td>
<td>7. Inquiry is influenced by values.</td>
<td>7. Inquiry is value-bound.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Data are &quot;given,&quot; not interpreted. Generalizability interpretations are, however, critical.</td>
<td>8. Data interpretations are needed, but are preferably narrow (tied closely to the data). Method helps reduce the range of viable data interpretations. Generalizability interpretations are, however, critical. They can be supported conceptually or with replications. Probability sampling helps.</td>
<td>8. Data interpretations are critical and can be broad. Method helps reduce the range of viable data interpretations. Transferability interpretations are important, but should be supported with replications.</td>
<td>8. Data interpretations are critical and, in fact, themselves comprise the most important data. Transferability interpretations are impossible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Internal validity is critical. Generalizability is often assumed.</td>
<td>9. Both internal and external validity are possible and important. (see #8)</td>
<td>9. Both credibility and transferability are possible and important. (see #8)</td>
<td>9. Neither internal nor external validity is possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Reliability is critical.</td>
<td>10. Reliability is possible and important.</td>
<td>10. Dependability is possible and important.</td>
<td>10. Reliability is impossible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Objectivity is guaranteed by method.</td>
<td>11. Objectivity is possible and desired.</td>
<td>11. Confirmability is possible and desired.</td>
<td>11. Objectivity is impossible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Data are never biased.</td>
<td>12. Unbiased data are possible. Need to reduce the effects of experimental demand, evaluation apprehension, and lying.</td>
<td>12. Data integrity is possible. Need to document events (e.g., pictures), and reduce the effects of evaluation apprehension and lying.</td>
<td>12. Data are always biased.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Random, stratified, and other probability sampling frames are essential.</td>
<td>15. Random, stratified, and other probability sampling frames are appropriate, as are nonprobability frames such as convenience samples in some cases.</td>
<td>15. Convenience and purposive sampling frames are appropriate.</td>
<td>15. Sampling design is irrelevant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Induction is not allowed. Theories are deductively falsifiable.</td>
<td>16. Induction is allowed. Theories can be (fallibly) confirmed through inductive processes and falsified through deductive processes.</td>
<td>16. Emergent designs use both inductive and deductive processes.</td>
<td>16. Emergent designs are inductive in nature. Theory confirmation and falsification are impossible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Only quantitative methods are appropriate.</td>
<td>17. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are appropriate. Focus is on quantitative methods.</td>
<td>17. Both quantitative and qualitative methods are appropriate. Focus is on qualitative methods.</td>
<td>17. Qualitative methods are preferred.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of the whole may lead some to view the whole as greater than the interaction of its parts and to reject the study of elements. Emergent properties are, however, quite consistent with elementarism. Water's freezing point is explained by the sharing of electrons across molecules as atomic movement slows due to falling temperatures. Further, claiming that the whole is more than the interactions of its parts is difficult to defend since the existence of the whole is isomorphic with the existence of its parts: Eliminating the parts eliminates the whole. Arguing for properties beyond the interactions among parts introduces supernatural concepts such as the soul that are beyond the current discussion.

Futility of Analyzing Parts

One gestaltist argument is that the parts are simply too numerous to be addressed meaningfully in the social sciences. This is commonly cited as a barrier to reductionism. It is, however, not entirely convincing. For example, it would be easy to dismiss interactions among neurotransmitters in the central nervous system as irrelevant to theory and research in consumer behavior. However, such neurophysiology may explain behavioral predispositions underlying compulsive consumption (e.g., O'Guinn and Faber 1989). Given the success of elementaristic physical science in the face of what probably seemed futile at one time, there is little justification for expelling elementarism from the social sciences on grounds of futility.

Fragmentability, Relativity, and Philosophy

Humanists sometimes advocate studying the gestalt because fragmentation may be impossible without altering the phenomena under study (Rist 1977). But in practice, humanists themselves fragment topics of study since there is actually only one grand gestalt whose scope is prohibitive. This grand gestalt includes interstellar gravitational forces, gluons, world politics, marital squabbles, and so on. Humanists differ from naturalist researchers not because they refuse to fragment, but rather because they fragment less.

The implication is that whether a particular study is elementaristic or holistic depends on an individual's perspective. In the eyes of a macroeconomist, humanist consumer researchers may appear elementaristic since they do not address the impact of rising interest rates, unemployment, and the money supply. On the other hand, neurophysiologists may see naturalist consumer research as holistic. Compared to the difference in levels of analysis between cultural anthropology and particle physics, the difference between humanist and naturalist inquiry within consumer research is slight. The purported humanism/naturalism chasm within consumer research is but a small crack on the face of the larger research terrain.

The relativity of the term gestalt highlights an important but often overlooked proviso for those trying to compare humanist and naturalist research. Inferring a researcher's philosophy from his/her method is dubious. If a researcher engages in observational studies, it might be tempting to infer that she is a humanist conducting holistic research. However, she may be a naturalist examining what she considers to be a small component of a much larger gestalt. Instead of reflecting an underlying and stable philosophy, the choice of method and level of analysis may be driven by substantive interest. The difference between philosophy and substantive interest parallels the difference between personality trait and situational factor. Regardless of the researcher's philosophy (trait), substantive interest in cultural rituals (situation) will probably require field research and less fragmentation than the study of memory.

Determinism vs. Voluntarism

Hudson and Ozanne (1988) argued that humanism is voluntaristic and naturalism is deterministic. Whereas voluntarism views people as actively interacting with their environment, determinism maintains that individuals primarily react to external stimuli. However, conservative humanists and liberal naturalists evidence a combination of voluntarism and determinism.

Conservative humanists recognize some measure of determinism when they acknowledge that human behavior is partially determined by an individual's history, culture, and current situation. For example, Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry (1989) found that some situations bred consumption sacredness while others did not.

On the other hand, liberal naturalists recognize the fact that human beings actively construct perceptions and their memories of those perceptions (cf. Hunt 1989). People's perceptions are often influenced by what they expect to see (e.g., Greenwald, Pratkanis, Leippe, and Baumgardner 1986), and reports of memories are easily biased by how a question is asked (e.g., Loftus and Zanni 1975). Thus, conservative humanists and liberal naturalists incorporate aspects of both voluntarism and determinism.

EPistemological Issues

Description vs. Causal Explanation

According to doctrinaire humanism, it is difficult to classify one variable as a cause and another as an effect since all variables are related to all other variables (even if indirectly and remotely so). Therefore, description rather than causation has been the traditional focus of humanist research (e.g., Geertz 1973). On the other hand, naturalist research has traditionally focused on unidirectional causation. Although these two positions are generally considered irreconcilable (e.g., Hudson and Ozanne 1988), the moderate versions of humanism and naturalism appearing in modern research practice are quite similar since each is descriptive and each is causal.

Liberal Naturalism as Descriptive and Causal

Naturalists claim interest in causal explanation, but description is common in research practice. Naturalist research is descriptive in three ways. First, naturalists often try to catalog behavioral phenomena, much like physical scientists catalog the elements in the periodic table. For example, some researchers have identified different types of cognitive responses that consumers have to advertisements (e.g., source bolstering; see Wright 1980).
Second, naturalists provide detailed descriptions of their procedures, research settings, subjects, and results. These descriptions are considered a matter of integrity since they help readers understand, critique, and replicate.

Third, the naturalist's causal explanation is, in actuality, a description of process. For example, assume that consumers in a particular market segment tell us that price is by far the most important attribute to them and that they have but one goal: pay as little as possible. Once we reduce our price to that below our competitors, we find that our market share increases by about the size of the segment we questioned. We can explain the sales increase in terms of a market segment that imposes a lexicographic decision rule focusing on price. Like all causal analyses, however, this explanation simply describes a process. We lowered our price which enticed (caused) the price sensitive segment to try our brand. While causal explanations include descriptions (even if they are descriptions of hypothetical processes), descriptions need not include causal explanations (e.g., "the flea market spanned five acres").

The causality addressed in naturalist research is not, however, limited to the unidirectional variety of doctrinaire naturalism. Liberal naturalists commonly assess multidirectional effects. As examples from the marketing literature, liberal naturalism has assessed bidirectional causality between (1) market share and return on investment (Jacobson and Aaker 1985), (2) ad attitude and brand attitude (MacKenzie et al. 1986), and (3) sales and word-of-mouth communication (Bayus 1985).

Conservative Humanism as Descriptive and Causal

Humanists claim interest in description, but causal explanation is common in research practice. Like their naturalist counterparts, humanist descriptions take three forms, the last of which is causal in nature. First, humanists often try to catalog behavioral phenomena. For example, Belk et al. (1989) classified consumption into either the sacred or the profane.

Second, humanists describe in great detail the physical surroundings and results of their studies. As with naturalist research, detailed descriptions are needed to help readers understand, critique, and replicate.

Third, humanists describe what Hudson and Ozanne (1988) call "simultaneous and dynamic shaping processes." In the context of family decision making, a humanist might describe how parents influence children and how children influence parents, without separating factors into a temporally ordered causal sequence (Hudson and Ozanne 1988). Although descriptive, this account describes the type of multidirectional influence that is routinely addressed in naturalist research (e.g., Jacobson and Aaker 1985). Although humanist and naturalist accounts may be comparable, the naturalist calls them causal explanations while the humanist calls them descriptions or interpretations.

Two recent examples from consumer research illustrate conservative humanism's interest in causes. First, Belk et al. (1989) conducted what is arguably a cornerstone study in humanist consumer research. Yet the authors devote 17 pages to how behaviors and rituals cause sacredness. Although using terms such as sacralization processes rather than causation, the following statements suggest that causality is at the heart of the authors' theory of sacred consumption.

Anything can become sacred. Sacredness is in large part an investment process. (p. 13)

Our data indicate that there are at least seven ways through which an object can become sacralized in contemporary consumer culture. (p. 14)

We have explored the consumer behavior processes through which sacralization, preservation of sanctity, and sometimes deconsecration occur. (p. 30)

We have chosen to adopt a clinical rather than critical perspective in describing the ways in which profane consumption is transfigured and made sacred. (p. 31)

The seven sacralization processes discussed by Belk et al. (1989) involve personal investments in specific activities. The authors spend little time discussing how sacredness arises from socialization long before an individual invests time and effort in a particular object or activity. For example, does decorating the house make it sacred as Belk et al. (1989) emphasize, or does the house's sacredness give rise to its decoration? The point is not that the authors should have discussed socialization more. The authors provide a rich and invaluable analysis of consumption sacredness. The point is that although humanist in nature, the research addresses causation, some of which appears unidirectional.

A second example of humanist assessments of causation comes from Sherry (1990). Sherry concluded that U.S. flea markets are popular largely because they are less regimented than other U.S. markets (i.e., their antistructural characteristic). Although Sherry does not explicitly address causes, his analysis can nonetheless be recast as causal: Disorder is an attribute of shopping contexts that influences (causes) their appeal.

Unless researchers are content to study static phenomena, both humanists and naturalists are bound to assess influences and processes. The examples provided here illustrate how conservative humanists and liberal naturalists assess the same types of influence. Unfortunately, terminological differences obscure the similarity and fuel "paradigm-based" prejudices. A cause (influence) by any other name is still a cause (influence): make, transfigure, due to, give rise to, shape, spawn, render, produce, generate, process of, why, motivate, because, determine, bring about, symbolize, etc.¹

Contextual and Temporal Constraints

Since humanists are forced to fragment despite a focus on the gestalt, doctrinaire humanism considers research findings to be completely bound by context and time (two critical variables in the gestalt). Accordingly, generalization is impossible and there is no need to enhance it with naturalist techniques such as random sampling.
Liberal naturalists, however, are not completely insensitive to the limitations of generalization. They study context effects and specify boundary conditions for their theories. Since liberal naturalists further recognize the validity of multiple interpretations, they also acknowledge that their interpretations can be time bound. Nonetheless, the primary force reconciling humanism's and naturalism's views on generalizability has come from the conservative humanists who, as discussed in the subsequent section on methodology, have adopted transferability as a research criterion.

Conservative humanist and liberal naturalist researchers differ only in the degree to which they generalize. Some have suggested that this implies incommensurability (Hudson and Ozanne 1988). However, the degree of a study's generalizability is determined by each reader, not just by the authors. For example, earlier it was noted that Sherry's (1990) conclusion that disorder increases the appeal of flea markets to U.S. consumers. Regardless of Sherry's view, another researcher might generalize by arguing that variety seeking is one mechanism underlying Sherry's results. If so, then societies dominated by haphazard shopping environments should find shopping malls a welcome change. While the different goals of humanism and naturalism may lead to different foci and interpretations, they need not imply incommensurability.

Researcher Independence and Values

Doctrinaire humanism maintains that researchers always influence target phenomena, whereas doctrinaire naturalism assumes that researchers typically do not influence target phenomena. However, it is evident that liberal naturalism recognizes that researchers influence subjects since naturalist research often tries to (1) minimize demand effects (e.g., Allen and Madden 1985), (2) reduce evaluation apprehension (e.g., Rosenberg 1969), (3) assess and control for context effects (e.g., stimulus order), (4) use multiple judges to reduce the effects of idiosyncratic perceptions on their results (MacKenzie et al. 1986), and (5) keep judges blind to experimental manipulations in deference to how easily expectations bias perceptions. Such methods are consistent with the attempts of conservative humanists to reduce and correct for researcher effects by using prolonged field observation, multiple observers, and member checks.

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

Interpretive License

Doctrinaire naturalism views data as given, not interpreted, whereas doctrinaire humanism grants broad interpretive license. One problem with granting broad interpretive license is that the data can become an "ink blot" onto which researchers project their theories. This is similar to the expression of idiosyncratic feelings by nonrepresentative artists. The need for self expression prevails over any wish to represent something outside of the artist or author. Like nonrepresentative art, humanist interpretations can be quite abstract. But while nonrepresentation is acceptable in artistic circles, it is more difficult to accept in academic research where expression is presumably governed by logic and/or data. Thus, broad interpretive license risks having the behavior of consumers become secondary to the researcher's need for self expression (Calder and Tybout 1989; Cohen 1989; Crapanzano 1986).

Yet humanists harbor an equally valid fear of doctrinaire naturalism and its experiments: The behavior of consumers may become secondary to the researcher's need to exercise control. While experimental controls may reduce the number of viable interpretations, such controls may affect a context so unnatural as to render the study meaningless. Thus, and in contrast to data interpretations, doctrinaire naturalism appears more tolerant of what might be called generalizability interpretations: interpreting laboratory findings as applicable to other contexts. Whether doctrinaire humanism's overall tolerance for the two types of interpretation is greater than that of doctrinaire naturalism is not clear. However, doctrinaire humanism and doctrinaire naturalism genuinely differ in their specific tolerances for data and generalizability interpretations.

Despite their differences, compromises from both sides have helped bridge the gap on interpretive license. First, as noted earlier in the discussion of multiple realities, the pragmatics of research dictate that liberal naturalists interpret their data (cf. Franklin 1990; Holbrook and O'Shaughnessy 1988). However, the interpretive license granted by liberal naturalism is considerably less than that granted by doctrinaire humanism. This discrepancy is partially the result of naturalism's reliance on experimental controls that help reduce the range of viable interpretations.

Second, like liberal naturalists, conservative humanists try to reduce the number of viable interpretations with variations on naturalism's validity and reliability (including generalizability and replication). These variations are discussed next. They demonstrate that interpretive license differs little between liberal naturalism and conservative humanism.

Validity and Reliability Issues

Conservative humanists have expressed concern over what naturalism refers to as validity and reliability. Although humanism's terms and assessment devices differ from those of naturalism, the underlying conceptualizations are comparable as is their goal of reducing the range of viable interpretations.

The concerns of conservative humanists with naturalist reliability and validity are evidenced in seven research criteria and practices. To begin, humanists in consumer research generally embrace the four research criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (see Belk et al. 1989; Hirschman 1986; Wallendorf and Belk 1989). While commonly positioned as distinct from naturalist criteria (e.g., Hirschman 1986), the overlap is considerable (see Smith and Heshustius 1986; Hudson and Ozanne 1988; Hunt 1991).

Credibility

Conservative humanism's credibility refers to the accuracy of the researcher's interpretation. This corresponds to naturalism's general concern with validity (internal validity,
construct validity, etc.). While conservative humanists may use different assessment devices as discussed below, the spirit and philosophy of credibility and validity are comparable (Hunt 1989, 1991). Both criteria are intended to bolster or validate the authors' interpretations.

Transferability
Conservative humanism's transferability refers to "... the transferability of one manifestation of a phenomenon to a second manifestation of the phenomenon, recognizing implicitly that no two social contexts are ever identical" (Hirschman 1986, p. 245). Differentiating transferability from naturalism’s generalizability and external validity is difficult. One possible difference is in the assessment of transferability which is based on additional studies rather than on, for example, sampling techniques. But transferability's assessment is then analogous to naturalist replication, whether direct (identical) or systematic (conceptual; e.g., Carlsmith, Ellsworth, and Aronson 1976).

Accepting transferability as a research criterion is an important concession from conservative humanists. Recall that doctrinaire humanism views all phenomena as completely context bound. The acceptance of transferability helps bridge the naturalism-humanism gap and enhances the ability to build a knowledge base within humanist inquiry. If there is no transferability, relating one study to the next is difficult.

Normatively speaking, a compromise position on the question of generalizability seems appropriate given the following intuition: Although all variables may influence all other variables, some such influences are bound to be negligible (e.g., sun spots and academic performance). Generalizability thereby falls on a continuum. It is not an all-or-none property. It may be quite high if contexts differ on only unimportant variables. Instead of assuming that generalizability either does (doctrinaire naturalism) or does not (doctrinaire humanism) exist, a more reasonable approach is to identify those influential variables that differ across contexts and then consider, or directly test, their effects.

Dependability
Conservative humanism’s dependability refers to the consistency and accuracy of a researcher's interpretations. It corresponds to naturalism’s interjudge agreement and general reliability (general reliability in the sense that field researchers are analogous to parallel test forms across which consistency is sought). Dependability is often assessed by searching for commonalities across the interpretations of multiple researchers. This too is a departure from doctrinaire humanism where each person's perception is considered a separate reality. When applying the criterion of dependability, conservative humanists make value judgments about the validities of overlapping realities (interpretations).

Confirmability
Conservative humanism’s confirmability is analogous to naturalism’s objectivity. Whereas doctrinaire humanism maintains that objectivity is impossible, liberal humanists view confirmability as possible and desired. This is consistent with liberal naturalism's attempts to enhance objectivity through methods such as multiple judges.

Integrity
Wallendorf and Belk (1989) added the humanist criterion of integrity to Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) list. Integrity is the extent to which data are not contaminated by lies and deceptions perpetrated by informants (see Nachman 1984 for examples). To reduce such influences, conservative humanists use, among other methods, prolonged field observation and triangulation. Like conservative humanism, liberal naturalism is concerned with integrity as evidenced in attempts to reduce the effects of evaluation apprehension (e.g., Rosenberg 1969), reduce the effects of experimental demand (e.g., Allen and Madden 1985), and temper interpretations of tests such as the MMPI with the informant's scores on lie scales.

Member Checks
Some humanists advocate the use of member checks to assess credibility (validity). Member checks consist of asking informants to assess the researcher’s interpretations (e.g., Hirschman 1986). If no leading questions are used, member checks are similar to naturalism's manipulation, confound, and demand checks, as well as questions sometimes asked in debriefing interviews (e.g., Allen and Madden 1985). All are intended to assess and enhance the validity of the interpretation. The difference is that naturalist researchers typically do not provide subjects with the data and interpretations to see if subjects concur. However, member checks are not inconsistent with naturalism and might generate theoretical insights and reveal unintended procedural effects within naturalist research.

The validity of member checks themselves, however, is threatened by three problems (cf. Ellen 1984). First, researcher interpretations may act like so-called "Barnum statements." Psychics have great success devising statements that are so general that most people will agree with them. In similar fashion, researchers may (inadvertently) devise broad and/or ambiguous interpretations with which most informants would agree. This possibility is exacerbated by the second problem: Informants may not be capable of understanding a researcher's interpretation. Third, informants may report agreeing or disagreeing with a researcher's interpretation for reasons other than their true level of agreement. For example, informants may respond in ways that put them in the most favorable light. Thus, while member checks are potentially valuable research tools, like most tools, their validity can be compromised in various ways.

Triangulation
Finally, Denzin (1978) noted that the phrase triangulation has been used to refer to the convergence of findings from different methodological devices, the convergence of opinions from different researchers, the convergence of findings from different data sources, and the convergence of different theories when applied to a particular phenomenon. Although differing from naturalism by focusing on qualitative rather than quantitative measures, these conservative humanist enhancements of validity and reliability correspond...
to naturalism’s multi-trait multi-method matrices, inter-rater reliability, systematic replication, and peer evaluation.

Recapitulation on Reliability, Validity, and Humanism
Doctrinaire humanism is not concerned with validity, reliability, or generalizability. Research findings are considered specific to a particular time, context, and researcher. In contrast, the practice of conservative humanism shares naturalism’s concern with validity, reliability, and generalizability, despite using different terms and assessment devices. This orientation limits the level of interpretive license within humanist research and provides the foundation for the bridge between humanism and naturalism.

Purposive vs. Random Sampling
Conservative humanists have recently advocated the use of purposive sampling. For example, Belk et al. (1989) expected consumers to see some products as sacred and others as profane. To support this, they examined consumers in various settings such as malls. However, the researchers purposively sampled from contexts where they expected to find no distinction between sacred and profane (e.g., shelters for the homeless). On the surface, such purposive sampling seems inconsistent with the random sampling advocated by naturalism. But naturalist researchers also use stratified sampling, blocking factors, and assess differences across populations and individuals. For example, Gaeth and Heath (1987) examined the effects of misleading advertising statements on younger and older consumers. They expected, and found, larger effects on the latter. Thus, humanism’s practice of purposive sampling corresponds to naturalism’s practice of stratified sampling and/or the study of strata by phenomena interactions.

Emergent Design vs. Theory Tests
It is often said that humanist research allows the study’s design to evolve and emerge as the research progresses (e.g., Hirshman 1986). This is supposedly different from naturalist research that assesses a priori hypotheses. However, the distinction overlooks emergence in the practice of naturalist research as well as a priori hypotheses in the practice of humanist research.

Emergent Design in Liberal Naturalism
Experimental research is often exploratory in nature and/or emergent across experiments. While pursuing Experiment 1, researchers are often unaware of the additional experiments their data will suggest. For example, Herr’s (1989) first experiment led him to believe that his hypothesized priming effect might depend on consumer knowledge, a hypothesis which he then tested in Experiment 2. Unfortunately, the prevalence of exploratory and emergent experimentation is obscured in the literature by a deductivist bias. Even if emergent, researchers are rewarded for writing post hoc reasoning as though a priori. 3

Hypothesis Testing in Conservative Humanism
Just as naturalist researchers look to the literature and their intuition regarding what they will find in a study, humanists often enter studies with expectations. For example, Belk et al. (1989) expected to find a secular/sacred distinction in some contexts but not others. This differs from naturalism only in semantics, not substance. The conservative humanist expects the sacredness effect to occur in only some contexts. He then studies the expectation by purposively sampling contexts where the effect is not expected. The naturalist, on the other hand, hypothesizes a sacredness by context interaction that she then tests by sampling from two different contextual strata.

The Complementarity of Humanism and Naturalism
It is tempting to limit humanism to theory generation and naturalism to theory testing. However, this demeans both approaches since it considers humanists to be technically unsophisticated and naturalists to be uncreative technicians. Humanism is capable of theory testing and naturalism is capable of theory generation.

However, the self-sufficiency of each approach in no way suggests a lack of complementarity. The inductive approach underlying much humanist research is better suited to theory generation than theory testing. On the other hand, the deductive approach underlying naturalist research is better suited to theory testing. In other words, humanist approaches excel in the context of discovery or in the substantive domain, whereas naturalist approaches excel in the context of justification or in the conceptual domain (see Brinberg and McGrath 1985; Hunt 1983).

Humanist and naturalist methods can be combined within a single study as replicates and/or complements. Mick and DeMoss (1990) demonstrated the replicative potential of the methods by analyzing interviews with traditional content analyses as well as interpretive analyses. O’Quinn and Faber (1989) demonstrated both complementarity and replication by using depth interviews in conjunction with survey methods. Their depth interviews served the dual function of (1) helping design the survey instrument and (2) providing insights and replications of the survey results (i.e., triangulation). While the two approaches are each self sufficient, they can be particularly powerful when combined.

Qualitative vs. Quantitative Measurement
While not an absolute distinction, naturalist researchers tend to quantify their data whereas humanists do not (cf. Deshpande 1983; but see Hunt 1991 for a different view). The humanist’s qualitative data pose two problems. First, without descriptive and inferential statistics, humanists can only present a selective sample of their data in a journal article. Readers then have little opportunity to evaluate the logic that links the authors’ data and conclusion. But humanists would rightly argue that they have little choice for data presentation, and that a biased sample of data might even be required to best illustrate their point. The difficulty of summarizing qualitative data for reader scrutiny suggests that monographs and archives are more appropriate than, or needed in addition to, journals for reporting ethnographic research.

Second, without quantification, intersubjective certifi-
ability becomes more difficult and there is a greater chance that the researcher’s perceptions will be biased. The order in which information is acquired can bias interpretations (pri-
macy and recency effects; see Miller and Campbell 1959),
historical analyses are plagued with hindsight biases (Fisher 1970; Fischhoff 1982), and researchers routinely see in their
data what they expect or want to see, especially in ambiguous
situations (confirmation biases; see Greenwald et al. 1986;
Hoch and Ha 1986). For example, if a researcher encounters seven incidents while observing a small village,
he may inadvertently weigh the first three more than the last four.
The first three may also lead to an implicit hypothesis
which the researcher then “sees” as being supported in the
last four. While quantification is no panacea, it may help.
From the seven incidents, an average score could be calcu-
lated in which each incident is weighted equally.

Yet neither quantification nor training eradicates re-
searcher biases. Averages can obscure important informa-
tion, especially if taken across sampling units (e.g., Ham-
mond, McClelland, and Mumpower 1980). Highly trained
experimentalists often fall prey to confirmation biases (e.g.,
Greenwald et al. 1986), hindsight biases are evidenced in
the work of highly trained historians (see Fisher 1970),
quantitative techniques are often misapplied (e.g., Cohen
1990; Landa and Lubin 1962), and miscalculations that sup-
port hypotheses are much less likely to be detected than
those that do not support hypotheses (e.g., Friedlander
1964). Although having the potential to reduce perceptual
biases, quantification does not eliminate them and may pro-
bate a false sense of security.

Quantification is not the only way to reduce biases. For
example, immersion into a culture may help (Wallendorf
and Belk 1989). Whereas a naturalist researcher might
 spend a few days running an experiment on the norm of
reciprocity, an anthropologist might spend two years study-
ing U.S. culture. In so doing she might observe the follow-
ing: (1) when receiving an unexpected Christmas card, a
person immediately mails a card to the sender, (2) people
report feeling in debt when receiving large gifts, (3) smaller
favors appear to be used to extract larger favors in return,
and (4) a father admonishes his son to send an interested
little girl a valentine since she sent one to him. Does the
anthropologist need means, standard deviations, and t-tests
to conclude that a norm of reciprocity exists?

At first glance the answer appears to be no. However, the
results could be misleading if the researcher observed rare
behaviors of an unusual minority (i.e., the sample was non-
representative). Further, quantification allows researchers
to compare differences in magnitudes across sampling units
(e.g., cultures). On the other hand, random sampling and
experimentation have their own shortcomings. If the effect
of reciprocity is subtle, common sample sizes may be too
small for experiments to detect it.

Thus, while researchers will naturally differ with respect
to quantification, there is little justification for arguing that
one type of data is necessarily superior. The choice of data
type will be driven by the type of question asked as well as
the researcher’s training and judgment. It is important to
realize, however, that mixing qualitative and quantitative
data where possible may yield more insight than using ei-
ther in isolation (e.g., see O’Guinn and Faber 1989).

RECAPITULATION: THE QUESTION OF COMMENSURABILITY

Since the publication of Kuhn’s book in 1962, the possi-

bility of commensurability has been a topic of heated de-
bate. Although philosophers (including Kuhn) have since
argued strongly against the notion of incommensurability
(see Hunt 1991), consumer researchers often argue for it.
The question of commensurability is broached here by ad-
ressing three related issues: metaphysics, level of analy-
sis, and publication criteria.

Commensurability and Metaphysics

One popular argument for incommensurability is that hu-
manism and naturalism are grounded in different meta-
physics. This led Hirschman (1986) to conclude, “... hu-
manistic inquiry and positivistic inquiry can no more be
merged or integrated than can Buddhism and Moham-
medanism” (p. 239). However, since metaphysics are arbitrary,
it is easy for them to be modified, combined, and/or ig-
ored. Thus, it is not surprising that metaphysical systems are
commonly merged: (1) the Baha’i faith combines seven
world religions including Buddhism and Mohammedanism,
(2) Roman Catholicism is blended with black magic along
the Amazon, (3) Christianity is mixed with animism in the
Philippines where priests and parishioners alike use amulets
to ward off evil spirits, and (4) humanism and naturalism
are increasingly combined within consumer research by
way of shared values (e.g., validity/credibility), beliefs
(e.g., multiple interpretations/realties), and methods (e.g.,
stratified/purpose sampling).

It is important to note, however, that reconciliation is
achieved more easily in practice than in institutional philo-

sophy. While parishioners may reconcile, it is unlikely that
the pope and the ayatollah will soon share sacrament. World War
I soldiers, while their commanders remained at war, com-
monly created localized truces across their trenches. They
socialized and even exchanged gifts with their enemies.
Despite different languages, the soldiers discovered that their
similarities far outweighed their differences. Perhaps con-
sumer researchers will come to a similar realization: Despite
their different terminologies, the similarities between liberal
naturalist and conservative humanist far outweigh their dif-
f erences. As Feyerabend (1987) claimed, incommensur-
ability is a problem for philosophers, not for scientists. The
question of a single reality is irrelevant to research practice as
long as researchers agree that multiple and valid interpreta-
tions (realities) are possible, and that some of these interpre-
tations (realities) are more likely to be valid than others.

Commensurability and Level of Analysis

Philosophers of science are increasingly disenchanted
with claims of incommensurability (see Hunt 1989, 1991).
Yet some consumer researchers argue that humanism and
naturalism are incommensurable because they have little in
common (e.g., descriptive vs. causal orientation; see An-
derson 1986; Hirschman 1986; Hudson and Ozanne 1988;
Ozanne and Hudson 1989). As evidenced throughout the
current article, however, the degree to which humanism and
naturalism share values, beliefs, and methods has been routinely underestimated.

Like many of the purported differences between humanism and naturalism, the debate over commensurability rests partially in semantics. Using the term incommensurable for philosophies is analogous to using the term incomparable for consumer choice alternatives that share few attributes (e.g., cars and vacations; see Johnson 1984, 1986, 1988). Yet consumers do decide between so called incomparable alternatives, in part by using more abstract criteria (e.g., overall value). In similar fashion, proponents of commensurability compare humanism and naturalism on more abstract attributes such as knowledge generation and research trustworthiness (see Hunt 1989). Whether an individual perceives humanism and naturalism to be commensurable depends to some extent on the individual’s level of analysis. Humanism and naturalism are more commensurable at abstract levels but less so at concrete levels.

Commensurability and Publication Criteria

One challenge facing consumer research is to develop publication criteria that can be applied equitably to both humanist and naturalist research. Since both schools aspire to trustworthy research, this more abstract criterion provides a good starting point (Hunt 1989).

Trustworthiness is enhanced by addressing what naturalists call validity and reliability, and what conservative humanists call credibility, dependability, confirmability, and integrity. Whether humanist or naturalist in nature, research papers should address these issues. For example, the effects of researchers and their tools on the people they study is problematic regardless of orientation and method. Experimental research, particularly when within-subjects manipulations are used, should carefully assess the possibility that the data are contaminated by experimental demand (see Allen and Madden 1985 for a good example). On the other hand, field researchers should try to reduce the effects of their presence on informants. One way to accomplish this is to engage in prolonged field observation (3 to 6 months) prior to collecting the data.

Developing and enforcing a rigid corpus of methodological standards is neither possible nor desired. Some topics and concepts may not lend themselves readily to methodological rigor and yet still merit careful study. For example, since the number of issues addressed in any one study is limited, research pioneering a new area may make a publishable contribution at conceptual levels despite limited methodological rigor. Although some measure of flexibility is needed for publication standards, the shared interest in trustworthiness suggests that authors, reviewers, and editors can expect most research to address it with the appropriate tools (Cronbach’s alpha. member checks, multiple observers/judges, etc.).

Summary: Commensurability in Perspective

The comparisons reported throughout the current discussion suggest that the number of differences between naturalism and humanism is routinely inflated. Many differences are merely ones of semantics (e.g., purposive vs. stratifiedsampling), while others exist only between doctrine naturalism and doctrinaire humanism. Although naturalist doctrine holds that researchers enjoy a privileged vantage point while observing their subjects, naturalist researchers do not. Liberal naturalists and conservative humanists agree that researchers contaminate their data and that they should try to reduce such effects.

The current comparisons indicate that through compromise, researchers have achieved at least partial reconciliation on many dimensions. This common ground is evidenced in Table 2’s list of features and beliefs shared by liberal naturalists and conservative humanists. This list does not, however, suggest complete commensurability between humanism and naturalism. Some of the dimensions are continua along which the approaches vary. For example, both approaches recognize generalizability, although naturalists generalize more than do humanists. Nonetheless, these commonalities reflect considerable overlap and demonstrate similarities where differences have been traditionally assumed. In conjunction with commensurability on abstract dimensions, the common ground evidenced in Table 2 suggests that liberal naturalism and conservative humanism are more commensurable than not.

The humanism/naturalism conflict within consumer research has the potential to fuel prejudices, breed dogma, and obscure from one camp the valuable work of the other. While some cling to extremist doctrine, many practicing researchers have already adopted a more fruitful middle ground. Liberal naturalists and conservative humanists share many concerns and practices. Unfortunately, much of this overlap is masked by differences in terminologies and in moot philosophical debates that have little bearing on research practice (e.g., the singleness of reality). Now that the doctrines of both sides have been aired and debated in various places, hopefully the time has come for researchers to recognize their common ground and build on each other’s strengths.

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**TABLE 2**

Features, Beliefs, and Interests Shared by Conservative Humanism and Liberal Naturalism

| 1. Multiple and valid data interpretations (realities) |
| 2. Credibility (validity) |
| 3. Transferability (generalizability and replication) |
| 4. Reliability (dependability) |
| 5. Confirmability (objectivity) |
| 6. Apparent differential validities of interpretations (realities) |
| 7. Subject honesty (integrity) |
| 8. Peer review |
| 9. Description |
| 10. Causation (influences and processes) |
| 11. Context effects |
| 12. Researcher effects |
| 13. Levels of analysis that are gestalts to some but elements to others |
| 14. Stratified (purposive) sampling |
| 15. Exploratory research |
| 16. Emergent research |
| 17. Hypothesis (expectation) assessments |
| 18. Qualitative data |
| 19. Quantitative data |
| 20. Induction |
| 21. Deduction |
| 22. Triangulation (convergence procedures) |
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NOTES

1. Although all of these terms allude to some sort of cause or influence, they must be taken in context. For example, the word symbolize can indicate either that some inner need causes a person's behavior, or that the audience perceives symbolism in a person's behavior. This distinction is readily apparent in literary criticism where the critic's symbolism may or may not be that of the author.

2. This is not to imply that doctrinaire naturalism assumes generalizability to the "real world." The research may assume generalizability to other experimental contexts as well. Researchers may actually accept considerable external validity as a necessary cost of carefully testing relationships that can later be assessed in more realistic settings.

3. There may be reasons for the bias. Writing post hoc hypotheses as though a priori might (1) inflate perceptions of a field's scientific prowess in the eyes of the greater research community, (2) inflate perceptions of the researcher's foresight, and/or (3) simplify writing by eliminating discussions of errant reasoning.

4. This presumes that researchers are interested in identifying culture-wide norms rather than the norms of those few people studied (i.e., generalizability or transferability is a goal).

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