

Paradigm	Research Question	Research Design
Positivism	Is the new policy effective in reducing poverty?	Conduct an experiment, comparing the proportion of people who move out of poverty in areas that do and do not have the new policy.
Interpretivism	How do welfare recipients experience their lives changing under the new policy?	Conduct in-depth, qualitative interviews, reporting the impact of the new policy on their lives from the perspectives of the welfare recipients.
Critical social science	Does the new policy really help the poor, or does it keep them oppressed?	Organize poor people to design and carry out their own study about the question as a way to mobilize them and help them gather evidence that they can use to lobby legislators for policy changes that are less oppressive.
Feminist	What impact does the new policy have on poor women?	Conduct in-depth, qualitative interviews, reporting the impact of the new policy on their lives from the perspectives of female welfare recipients.  Or  Organize poor women to design and carry out their own study about the question as a way to empower them and help them gather evidence that they can use to lobby legislators for policy changes that are less oppressive to women.

**Figure 3-3** How Might a New Welfare Reform Policy be Researched Differently from the Perspective of Different Paradigms?

the battering, find excuses for the batterer, or think they cannot leave the batterer, a feminist researcher might note the discrepancy between the women's subjective views and the objective reality as seen by the researcher. A feminist researcher might also raise questions about the reasons for these undesirable discrepancies and attempt to derive recommendations for raising the women's feminist consciousness and empowering them. Figure 3-3 provides an additional example of how different paradigms can influence research.

### Paradigmatic Flexibility in Research

As you read about these paradigms, perhaps you find yourself favoring one or disliking another, but you do not have to choose one over another. Individual researchers may find that their investigations resemble one paradigm in one study and a different paradigm in another study—depending on what they seek to investigate. Moreover, they may find that sometimes they combine elements of more than one paradigm in the same study.

Each paradigm has its own advantages and disadvantages. We've discussed some of these advantages and disadvantages above. The disadvantages are most noticeable when an extremist view of a particular paradigm is championed. Early positivists, for example, were particularly vulnerable to criticism when they failed to recognize the elusive nature of social reality and the role of subjectivity. At the other extreme are postmodernists who deny the existence of an external objective social reality, who say it is unknowable, and who argue that each individual's own subjective view of social reality is just as valid as any other's. Those who espouse this view must contend with a different line of questioning. If an external objective social reality doesn't exist, they may be asked, then how have they observed this to be true? If an external reality is unknowable, then how do they know that?

Although we recognize serious problems in some extremist views of certain paradigms, we do not intend to advocate the choice of one paradigm or another. Perhaps you should think of them as though they were a bag of golf clubs. Different situations call