Common Misconceptions about Qualitative Research

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Overview of *just a few* misconceptions in qualitative research.

- Documented in literature
- And personally experienced

Q&A.

ORS Resources.
Qualitative Inquiry - Review

- Aims to ‘better understand’
  - Gain deeper insights, meaning-making
  - ‘How’ and ‘why’ explanations
  - Non-numerical representations are primary
  - Sample size & sampling techniques vary
  - Illuminate multiple perspectives
  - Interactive (research-participant)
Misconception #1: “It’s easier.”

- NO, but it’s different...
- Why do people think this...?

- Different preparation from other approaches
- Often, different paradigm/philosophies

- There are specific skills and procedures to learn for the various qualitative method(ologies)
Misconception #2:

“Quantify your themes/categories. (Give frequency counts).”
-Reviewer #2

- Better understanding is the goal
  - Thick descriptions of data/phenomena (Tracy, 2013)
  - Not generalization, statistical significance, etc.

- Numerical representativeness of codes/categories/themes is not a determinant in qualitative approaches
  - Possible for a code/category to only have one response or one exemplar
  - One novel response could highlight a very important finding as related to the RQs and could bring about important new meanings or understandings (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2004; Tracy, 2013)

- Your paradigmatic philosophies, approach, objective, etc. will influence this, however...
  - Thoughts?
Misconception #3: “You won’t get tenure [or published] using qualitative approaches.”

- Not true!
- BUT...these approaches *can* take longer
  - *EX:* the ‘human factor’ of scheduling interviews, transcription, theoretical saturation and potentially needing to ‘go back to the field’ for more data, negotiating access to scene or participants, etc.
- Talk with your Chair/Dean; explain the differences AND benefits
- Understand the journals, too
  - Timeline for review
  - Expertise of editorial board
Misconception #4: “Small sample sizes are inappropriate and don’t contribute to the body of literature.”

- Small “n” is satisfactory in many qualitative approaches (Patton, 2015)
- Richness & rigor can be derived from:
  - Thick description; longitudinal data collection
  - Multi-method collection (e.g., interviews, observations, follow-ups)
- Large “n” does not indicate quality or rigor (Creswell, 2013; Tracy, 2013)
  - Striving for in-depth understanding, not generalization
- Identify nuances (even with $n=1$) to spark future inquiry
- Not enough data “will result in shallow and stale contributions. Too many will result in a paralyzing amount of data” (Tracy, 2013, p. 138).
- All in all: this depends on your approach & justification of methodological decisions
Misconception #5: “You cannot make causal claims with qualitative data.”

- Certain types of relationships/causality can be asserted from qualitative data (see Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2004; Patton, 2015; Tracy, 2013)
- Qualitative research is not focused on proposing generalizations...
  - It is focused “on generating explanations of contextualized activity and rich qualitative data are extremely valuable for such purposes” (Tracy, 2013, p. 219).
- Qualitative data are oftentimes better in developing explanations about “local causality”
  - *Local causality*: describes local, contextualized events and processes that have led to outcomes or influences within a specific setting/scene/relationship/etc. (see Maxwell, 2004; Tracy, 2013)
- BUT, be very mindful of any claims you purport
  - Do you have enough evidence? Documentation? Justification of choices? Thick description?
  - Theoretical saturation?
  - Are you staying grounded in the context?
Misconception #6: “You should be coding ‘this’ way.”

- Some qualitative approaches do have exact ‘steps’ to their coding procedures...
  - EX: constant comparative method from Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)
- Coding is just ONE method for analyzing qualitative data

- The interpretive, meaning-making process that is coding will vary from researcher to researcher
  - “Coding is not a precise science; it is primarily an interpretive act” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 5)
- Differences do emerge in coding methods/procedures
  - Especially team coding...
Misconception #7: “Arts-based approaches aren’t research.”

- Arts and Humanities Research Paradigm = research as performance (Davis & Lachlan, 2017)

- It is research. The goals are just a bit different:
  - To present the finds in a manner which represents and evokes the aesthetic of what you are trying to communicate
  - To challenge, resist, and transform the more traditional hegemonic methods of representing reality
  - To bridge academic writing and lay writing (Bhattacharya, 2017; Butler-Kisber, 2017; Davis & Lachlan, 2017)

- Visual ethnography & documentaries, performance studies/writing, poetry, etc.

  2017 NYU Forum on Ethnodrama
Other misconceptions?

- From experience?
- Noted in literature?
Resources

- Research Design & Data Analysis Lab: https://www.uttyler.edu/research/ors-research-design-data-analysis-lab/

- Schedule a consultant appointment with me for qualitative questions: https://www.uttyler.edu/research/ors-research-design-data-analysis-lab/ors-research-design-data-analysis-lab-consultants/

- Other Consultants: Quantitative, academic writing, surveys, etc.

- Future webinars/workshops
Today @ 3:00pm

Dr. Matthew Kelly

“Using Auto-ethnography and Self-reflection in Academic Writing”
References

Other Questions?

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