

# Diving Deeper: Qualitative Analysis and Interpretation

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Austin, Texas - June 19, 2009

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## Intended Outcomes

- Participants will...
  - *differentiate paradigms of inquiry;*
  - *outline acceptable standards of rigor for qualitative research / assessment;*
  - *define the steps involved in general qualitative data analysis; and,*
  - *be willing to give it a try!*

## One step back...

### Paradigm(s) of inquiry...

- A way of looking at the world.
- Provides the assumptions, the rules, the direction, and the criteria by which “normal science” is conducted.

(Thomas Kuhn [1970] as cited in Erlandson et al. [1993])

## Paradigms of Inquiry

### Positivist

#### Realist Ontology

- There is Truth
- It is discoverable

#### Objectivist Epistemology

- Distance / detachment between the knower and the known
- Objectivity is possible

#### Interventionist Methodology

- *A priori* hypotheses
- Controlled conditions

### Constructivist

#### Relativist Ontology

- Realities are multiple
- Realities are socially-constructed

#### Subjectivist Epistemology

- Impossible and undesirable to separate the knower from the known
- Outcomes = result of the relationship between researcher and participants

#### Hermeneutic Methodology

- Continuous interaction between knower and known
- Dialogue between researcher and data

## Assumptions...

...of constructivist qualitative research

- Realities are multiple and socially-constructed.
- There is a mutually-shaping relationship between the knower and the known.
- Inquiry is value-laden.
- The purpose of research (assessment) is understanding.

(adapted from Whitt, E.J.)

## Standards of Rigor

...are different but no less important.

- Trustworthiness
  - Credibility
  - Transferability
  - Dependability
  - Confirmability

## Trustworthiness: Credibility

- Are the researcher's interpretations credible to the study participants (a.k.a., respondents)?
  
- Established through:
  - Triangulation
  - Peer debriefing
  - Member checks
  - Search for alternative evidence / explanations
  - Humility throughout the process

## Trustworthiness: Transferability

- To what extent are the findings applicable to other settings?
  
- Established through:
  - Thick, rich description of the study context, design, and participants
  - Is a decision made by the reader, not an assertion by the researcher

## Trustworthiness: Dependability

- To what extent were the research methods decisions made consistently and appropriately throughout the course of the study?
  
- Established through:
  - Audit trail

## Trustworthiness: Confirmability

- Do the results of the study make sense? And, can they be confirmed by others?
  
- Established through:
  - Audit trail

## Data Analysis

“...the process of making sense of one’s data...organizing what you have seen, heard, and read, so that you can make sense of what you have learned, create explanations, pose hypotheses, develop theories, link your story to other stories.”

~ Glesne & Pushkin

## Data Analysis

“Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data. It is a messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative, and fascinating process. It does not proceed in linear fashion; it is not neat. Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data...”

~ Marshall & Rossman

## Data Analysis

- Concurrent with data collection
  - Ongoing analysis
  - Final analysis
  
- Inductive
  - From the specific to the general
  - From the data themselves to the results

## Types of Analysis

- Grounded in the genre framing the study
  - Phenomenology
  - Ethnography
  - Case Study
  - Narrative Inquiry
  - Critical theory (race, feminist, queer)

## Reminder...

What is your assessment question?

## Generic Data Analysis

- ④ Organize the data
- ④ Familiarize yourself with the data
- ④ Generate categories, themes, and patterns
- ④ Code the data
- ④ Search for alternative explanations
- ④ Write the report

~ Rossman & Rallis, 1998

## Organize the Data: Example

- Focus group interview logs (Merriam, 1998)

## Organize the Data: Example

**Off-Campus Study  
Focus Group Interview Logs  
Spring 2006**

**Participants**

|    |             |        |   |   |
|----|-------------|--------|---|---|
| DB | Female (IL) | Senior | Mathematics / Biology<br>Going to grad school   | Bahamas   |
| DZ | Female (MN) | Senior | History / Soc/Anthro<br>Going to grad school  | Barbados / Trinidad<br>1 <sup>st</sup> int'l trip               |
| Ni | Female      | Junior | Soc/Anthro / Bio / Gmn<br>Plans grad school   | Barbados / Trinidad<br>1 <sup>st</sup> int'l trip               |
| BF | Male        | Senior | Politics and Russian<br>Plans grad school (07 or 08)  | St. Petersburg,<br>Russia                                       |
| JR | Female      | Senior | Politics / History / Int'l<br>Business<br>Summer Americorps Vol.<br>Unsure after that<br>Eventually grad school | Geology of Nat'l<br>Parks<br>South Dakota,<br>Nebraska, Wyoming |

## Organize the Data: Example

|     |   |
|-----|---|
| 215 | DB – [discussion of experiencing cultural stuff w/ bio class] We had time in the evenings where we got to go out and hang out with the native people. [history of the island – San Salvador; Columbus, celebrations of culture]   |
| 222 | DZ – I’m a sociology / anthropology major so it was absolutely fascinating to be able...I’d been in research methods earlier in the year and I did do a research paper, a study on subcultures of librarians. But, to go to a new place and a completely different culture just was...it was very interesting. I don’t know...amazing is the word that keeps coming to my mind just because you can really put what you’ve been learning all those years into effect. [instead of just reading about how to interact in a different culture, actually did that] |
| 230 | DZ – [future – wants to be librarian; anthro good because will be interacting w/ many different cultures; want to be able to help]  |

## Organize the Data: Example

|     |  |
|-----|--|
| 232 | Ni – This trip, I think, was really a turning point in my studies to be an anthropologist...just because previously, I had read about the theories, I had read the ethnographies, the articles about all of these different cultures and all these different methods. I’d taken the research methods course and gone out and done field work with florists and learned how to do the participant-observation in a microcosm of American culture. But actually going to Trinidad and Barbados and being completely immersed in this new culture and having the field work and experiencing the culture shock and all these different aspects of it...it’s far different than reading about it. We would be lectured on a certain theory in the morning and you could go out and you could actually see examples of the theory. It makes a much greater point to see these examples than to read about them. |
| 240 | DZ – It makes anthropology real.   |
| 244 | Ni – [go into biocultural anthropology; want to go to grad school; not sure would enjoy field work...trip helped see how dynamic field work can be, how can help you learn] [applying for biocultural anthro fellowship – talked about how west indies trip changed outlook]   |

## Becoming familiar with the data

- ④ Read, read, read your data
- ④ Transcribe?
  - Listen, listen, listen to your data
- ④ Hold a conversation with your data
- ④ Keep notes about your thoughts, ideas, questions

## Generate Categories, Themes, Patterns

- ④ Identify salient themes, recurring ideas, recurring language, patterns of belief
  - Focus: assessment question
- ④ Interrogate the data
- ④ Concept mapping – important ideas
- ④ Try them on...debrief

## Code the Data

- Iterative process
- Determining what is evidence of a category or theme
- What words, phrases, examples illustrate the concepts you identified
- What have we missed?
- Mechanics
  - By hand
  - By qualitative software analysis package
  - Right-hand column of word-processed document

## Coding: Example

**Code: mission-reflects/reinforces {19-0}**

P 1: C-N final report.txt - 1:16 [There is fairly broad institut..] (189:195) (Super)  
Codes: [mission-reflects/reinforces]

There is fairly broad institutional support and ownership for the BLL. Many respondents said that the BLL reflects and helps to implement the mission of C-N by bringing faculty and students together across disciplines and in informal settings to "pose questions not typically asked in class." There was a shared sense that this is the kind of seamless learning that reflects "who we are and what we are about." Several academic administrators indicated that C-N would want to continue the BLL in some way if its current director (the VP of SA) ever left the institution.

P 1: C-N final report.txt - 1:19 [The programs developed by BLL ..] (206:209) (Super)  
Codes: [mission-reflects/reinforces]

The programs developed by BLL are seen by educators both as "one more tool to accomplish our mission at C-N," and also as a distinctive innovation alongside the other educational programs on campus: "it's learning as a joint venture in ways we don't experience elsewhere."

## Search for Alternative Explanations

- Challenge the patterns that seem apparent
- What other plausible explanations / interpretations exist?

## Search for Alternative Explanations

Remember...

“...every way of seeing is also a way of not seeing.”

~ Silverman

## Write the Report

- ④ Writing is essential to qualitative data analysis
- ④ “Writing is thinking.” (Wolcott)
- ④ Fuzzy writing stems from fuzzy thinking.

## Write the Report

- ④ Consider
  - Purpose of the study
  - Audience
  - Format
  - Voice
  - Content
- ④ How best to “tell the story”

## Questions for Consideration

- What was the purpose of the assessment?
- What were the results of the assessment?
- What conclusions / interpretations did I draw?  
How closely linked are the conclusions / interpretations to the results?
- What, if any, methodological assumptions did I make?

## Questions for Consideration

- What are the limitations of the assessment?  
Have I adequately outlined them?
- What steps did I take to ensure the trustworthiness of the assessment project? To what extent were appropriate standards of rigor met?
- Did I conduct the assessment ethically?

## Your Turn

- Questions / Concerns