

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS

Professor: Peter Fraenkel, Ph.D.

Day and Time: Wednesdays, 2:00 p.m. – 3:50 p.m.

Office Hours: Wednesdays, 01:00 p.m. – 1:50 p.m., 3:45- 4:30, or by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Historical Overview: Over the past two decades there has been a resurgence of interest in qualitative approaches to psychological research. Historically speaking, it is important to emphasize that this is indeed a *resurgence*, not an entirely new development, as many of the pioneers of modern psychology working in the early- to mid-part of this century used qualitative methods. As the field of psychology (and other social sciences as well) sought to establish scientific respectability, it moved away from qualitative methods and towards the hypothesis-testing, experimental, quantitative methods that dominated the so-called “hard sciences” – biology, chemistry, and physics. Although quantitative, experimental methods have yielded many important findings in psychology, and will continue to have a central role, many researchers have noted the limitations of these methods for studying complex human experiences and behaviors. In addition, the postmodern movement in the sciences and humanities over the last 20 years or so has critiqued the positivist tradition, and suggests the need to regard the persons studied in research as informants who are considered experts on their situation, rather than as “subjects” to be studied by expert researchers.

Qualitative research is chiefly conducted through obtaining study participants’ perspectives through careful interviewing, and through use of participant-observation methods to acquire a rich, nuanced understanding of the relationship between the phenomenon of interest and its social context. Qualitative inquiry can serve as a first step in developing hypotheses for later quantitative testing; it can follow after a quantitative study to explore more deeply particular findings; and it can stand on its own as a rigorously-derived description of phenomena. Especially in the study of clinical phenomena, community psychology, and the evaluation of treatment, educational and other interventions, researchers have increasingly been drawn to qualitative approaches. Because much of qualitative research relies on interviews and sorting of data into themes, clinical psychologists appear particularly drawn to this form of inquiry, as the skills and sensitivities needed for good qualitative work are quite similar to those required of good clinicians.

Qualitative research is also a highly reflexive process – it engages us to think not just about the data of the phenomena we study, but in an ongoing way, about how we come to construct knowledge: how we define phenomena; how different ways of “looking” and thinking create different data; the impact of our particular nexus of social locations in terms of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and other dimensions of difference on the research process; and how we summarize and present our findings. This reflexivity represents another parallel between qualitative research and clinical work, where assessments can markedly vary from one another depending on what are considered to be

the relevant problems, etiologies, signs and symptoms, resources, assessment methods, and the self and social context of the therapist.

Course Overview: The goal of this course is to equip students with the thinking and methods of qualitative research. Although students will become familiar with the range of ideas and methods categorized as qualitative, the focus of this course will be on applying these methods to study clinical and community mental health issues and interventions. In addition, two qualitative traditions will be emphasized – **grounded theory**, which is one of the original and most popular approaches, and whose methods form a kind of generic template adapted by other more specific, theory-driven approaches – and **psychobiography**, an approach particularly well-suited to research in clinical psychology. Students will become familiar with other qualitative traditions through in-class presentations. By the end of the course, students should feel competent enough to conduct independent qualitative research, from designing a research question, to data collection and analysis, to writing up the results, and as appropriate, to utilize the findings in clinical program development, evaluation, and refinement, and in policy work.

COURSE ORGANIZATION

My experience in teaching research, including qualitative research, is that students learn best by simultaneously reading intensively and conducting actual research. In this way, theory and praxis come together, and each reciprocally informs the other. Thus, in the first few weeks of the course, we will learn the basics of qualitative research through designing an interview, conducting interviews with one another and/or writing our own responses to the interview questions, coding the responses, and clustering the codes into higher-order categories that form the basis of a descriptive theory. Subsequent classes will include lectures by me, exercises to become familiar with particular methods, critical review of published qualitative studies, and presentation by students of coded data that emerges from the qualitative interview conducted as part of the Psychological Center's psychotherapy outcome study, and/or other data sets.

Experience in Qualitative Interviewing and Coding: As a student in this class, your required role in the psychotherapy outcome study is to interview one patient about their beliefs about psychotherapy. However, if you are simultaneously enrolled in Adult Intake and in this course, in order to keep the research interview and intake process separated, you will conduct the qualitative interview in the fall or spring of your Second-Year. This interview will occur by the day of the patient's final intake session, or within a week of that last intake session and before the feedback session. The interview is designed to last no longer than 30 minutes. The interview will be audiotaped.

In teams of two-to-four students (depending on the number of students in the class), you will transcribe an interview and code it qualitatively, using codes developed from previous interviews and adding new ones as needed. You and your teammate(s) will present the interview and your codes in class for discussion, and will submit your work to me and your classmates through email. We will organize the flow of coding among groups over the

semester so that each team builds upon the work of others to formulate a grounded theory of patients' beliefs about psychotherapy.

NOTE: Because we cannot guarantee that there will be enough new patient interviews to code for a particular class (as it depends on patient flow into the clinic and other factors beyond the control of the present instructor), we may utilize other data qualitative sets for this group coding assignment.

Group Presentations on Qualitative Methodology: In teams of four students, you will summarize and present on a particular application/version of qualitative methodology to a topic of clinical interest ~ for instance, the application of grounded theory, psychobiography, phenomenology, participatory action research, cultural studies, feminism, queer theory, critical theory, or others to clinically-relevant questions and phenomena. This will give you an experience of teaching and presenting about research, an important part of your overall training. It also efficiently exposes the entire class to a range of ideas and practices without having a huge reading load. See more details on the presentations on page 6 of this syllabus.

Sequence of Course Topics: You will note that the lecture topics skip around a bit from the standpoint of how a research project typically evolves. As we'll discuss, research begins with a question; then, careful reflection on one's personal and professional interests in the topic, so as to identify useful and problematic biases. From there, it's on to a search for or refinement of a theoretical frame, and then, on to methods for data collection and analyses. Initial data are collected, the question is refined or changed altogether, methods may shift, further data are collected, and eventually, the final set of data is analyzed and summarized. Yet the topics for our course begin with a general orientation to the field, then move to interviewing, then to data analysis, later back to a discussion of the variety of qualitative approaches, even later on to what would seem to be a logical early topic - designing the research question! The reason for the particular order of topics is to equip you as early as possible with the fundamental ideas, attitudes, and skills to allow us to carry out the praxis aspect of the course - the interviews and analyses. In addition, my experience teaching the course so far is that most students only begin to define a possible research question of their own towards the end of the semester. Thus, to best support your development as it naturally occurs, this topic as well as others related to designing your own research are taken up later in the first semester, and form the basis for our work in the second semester. Of course, you're welcome to read and think ahead!

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADES

1. **Weekly readings.** Each week, students are required to submit a half-page single-spaced (12 pt font) set of questions and/or comments about the readings for that class. Questions/comments can center on any aspect of the reading - theory or implementation of the ideas/practices described, concerns about the applicability across topics and participants (in terms of domains of inquiry, participant social location or clinical status), or relationship to other concepts and methods encountered thus far in the course. Students are encouraged to be inspired as well

as constructively critical of the readings. Examples of being inspired: How do the ideas and methods described clarify some aspect of qualitative research? How can you imagine applying these ideas and methods to a topic of interest to you? Examples of being constructively critical: What are the inconsistencies, redundancies, insensitivities, and ambiguities in the ideas and practices described?

Deadline: Commentaries must be sent to the instructor and all students by email not later than 8 p.m. on the Tuesday before the relevant class on Wednesday. Failure to submit the readings by that day and time will result in no credit for the summary.

Grade: Each commentary is worth 1 point, for a total of 15 points of the course grade.

2. **Group in-class presentations on qualitative theory, method, and application.**

Each group of 4 students will do one presentation on an application of qualitative methodology to a topic of clinical relevance. The presentation must:

- a. Summarize one chapter or article on methodology. Summaries must be submitted and presented using PowerPoint.
- b. Critically evaluate two research articles relevant to the methods/applications described (e.g., if the topic is observational methods, two articles that utilized observational methods; if the topic is Queer Theory research, two articles on qualitative studies that engaged that point of view.). Present also in PowerPoint.

Deadline: PowerPoint files and all other relevant materials (Word files, etc) must be submitted via email to me and classmates no later than the Tuesday 11 p.m. before your presentation. I will provide the laptop, LCD projector, and any other technology you need. Please notify me one week in advance of your presentation if you need anything other than laptop (I have a PC) and LCD.

Grade: Presentation is worth 20 points of the course grade. Please provide me with a breakdown of who in the group took the lead on what part of the presentation - e.g., (Tom and Nancy did the PowerPoint on the chapter, Celia and Antonio reviewed the first article, Tom and Celia reviewed the second, and Nancy and Antonio came up with the activity"). If it was totally collaborative with everyone contributing fairly equally to everything, please indicate that.

3. **Coding a "beliefs about psychotherapy" interview.** In groups of two-to-four students, you will transcribe and code one pre-therapy interview on beliefs about psychotherapy. The coding project should be summarized as a research poster, to be presented in a poster session during the final class. In class, I will illustrate how to create a qualitative research poster. Please also be sure to provide me with an electronic file of the transcript and coding. The coding will either be done using AtlasTi (a qualitative software program) or using Excel.

Deadline: Poster must be completed in time for the final class.

Grade: 25% of course grade

4. **Term paper:** Individual psychobiographical study. You will select an autobiography of interest to you, and code the first chapter using psychobiological and grounded theory methods. Your paper should be no longer than 15 double-spaced pages, and should start with a description of what drew you to this autobiography; a brief statement of your qualitative methodology; a several paragraph summary of the chapter's content and style; and then detailed coding of at least 10 pages of the chapter, resulting in a set of substantive (first-order) codes linked to the raw data, and theoretical (higher-order codes) that link the substantive codes and provide a preliminary qualitative analysis of this person. Your discussion should reflect on what we can understand about this person based on the qualitative analysis, and what was not revealed or remains to be learned. You are welcome to focus on one theme within the chapter.

Deadline: Due by email the Friday one week after last class.

Grade: 40% of course grade

SUMMARY OF ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING:

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Percentage of Grade</u>
1. Readings Commentaries Due: Emailed not later than 8 pm night before relevant class	15%
2. Group presentation on qualitative method and application Due: Emailed not later than 9 pm Tuesday night before presentation	20%
3. Poster of group coding of clinic study interview Due: in time for last class	25%
4. Term paper: Individual autobiographical study: Due: Emailed to me Friday a week after last class by midnight	40%

Requirements for emailing documents: Please be sure to label group presentations with the group # first and then the title of the file. Likewise, please label your term paper file with your last night first in the file name, followed by the brief title of the paper.

SEMESTER ONE READINGS

One book will serve as the core text for the course. The book is available at the CCNY bookstore.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London: Sage.

Other general readings will be emailed pdfs of articles or chapters.

Most of the chapters for student presentations are in the following text:

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2000). *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Those that are not in this book I have as pdfs and will email. I will have one copy of each relevant chapter of the Handbook copied per group; or we can scan and distribute.

Articles for student presentations must be located by you.

Autobiographies for the term paper must be located by you.

WEEKLY TOPICS, READINGS, & ACTIVITIES

Core readings (required for everyone) are listed in bold immediately under the topic for the week.

Weeks One and Two

Topic: No Lecture Topic - Pure Praxis Leading to Profound Insight about the Nature of Qualitative Research

Activity: Getting the Feel of Doing Qualitative Research

In this session we will create and conduct a participant-observational study on a topic to be determined. We will construct a brief interview; collect data; code the data using one of the core practices, the constant comparative method; and draw preliminary conclusions. We will use this experience to create a “grounded,” experience-based definition of qualitative research.

Week Three

Topic: What is Qualitative Research? How does it differ from Quantitative Research?
Overview of Epistemologies, Practices, and Controversies

Charmaz, Chapter 1

Bryman, A. (2004). Chapter 13: Qualitative research. *Social research methods*. New York: Oxford University Press (2nd ed.) (pp. 266-189).

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2000). Introduction. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 1-28). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Fraenkel, P. Schoen, S., Perko, K., Mendelson, T., Kushner, S., & Islam, S. (1998). The family speaks: Family members' descriptions of therapy for sexual abuse. *Journal of Systemic Therapies*, 17, 39-60.

Markman, H. J., Floyd, F. J., Stanley, S. M., & Storaasli, R. D. (1988). Prevention of marital distress: a longitudinal investigation. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 56, 210-217.

Week Four

Topic: Evaluating the Quality of a Qualitative Study: Reliability and Validity Reconceived

Charmaz, Chapter 8

Smith, J. K., & Deemer, D. K. (2000). The problem of criteria in the age of relativism. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 877-896). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Altheide, D. L., & Johnson, J. M. (1998). Criteria for assessing interpretive validity in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (pp. 283-312). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Activity: Continued work on group projects; discussion of challenges and solutions that emerged and how these refine our thinking about the theory and praxis of qualitative research.

Weeks Five & Six

Topic: Qualitative Interviewing and Design of Interview Protocols

Charmaz, Chapter 2

Handout: Principles of Narrative Interviewing

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.) Newbury Park, CA: Sage. Chapter 7: Qualitative Interviewing pp. 277-368

Week Seven & Eight

Topic: Data Analysis: Substantive Coding and Memos

Charmaz Chapters 3 & 4

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). Chapter V: The constant comparative method of qualitative analysis. In *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research* (pp. 101-115). Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company

Ryan, G. W., & Bernard, H. R. (2000). Data management and analysis methods. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 645-673). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Weitzman, E. A. (2000). Software and qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 803-821). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Activity: Demonstrating AtlasTi software.

Week Nine & Ten

Topic: Psychobiography and Case Studies

Alexander, I. (1990). Chapter 1: A personological approach to personality assessment and psychobiography. In *Personology: method and content in personality assessment and psychobiography* (pp. 1-60). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Newton, P. M. (1995). Some suggestions for the conduct of biographical research. *Journal of Adult Development*, 2, 147-158.

Handouts: Alexander's 9 Points of Saliency

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Stake, R. E. (2000). Case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 435-454). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Week Eleven

Topic 1: Ethnography

Rizzo, T.A., Corsaro, W.A., & Bates, J.E. (1992). Ethnographic methods and interpretive analysis: Expanding the methodological options of psychologists. *Developmental Review*, 12, 101-123.

Topic 2: Observational Methods

Angrosino, M. V., & Mays de Pérez, K. A. (2000). Rethinking observation: From method to context. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 673-703). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Week Twelve

Topic 1: What is social science theory? How do we create it with qualitative research?

Charmaz, Chapters 5-6

Blalock, H.M. (1969). *Theory construction: From verbal to mathematical formulations*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall. Chapters 1 - 3 (pp.1-47).

Topic 2: Writing the Qualitative Research Document and Dissertation Proposal

Charmaz Chapter 7

Week Thirteen

Feminism

Group 1 presentation

Olesen, V. L. (2000). Feminisms and qualitative research at and into the millennium. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 215-256). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Madriz, E. (2000). Focus groups in feminist research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 835-850). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Two relevant research articles

Race and Ethnicity and Ethnography

Group 2 presentation

Ladson-Billings, G. (2000). Racialized discourses and ethnic epistemologies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 257-278). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Tedlock, B. (2000). Ethnography and ethnographic representation. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 455-386). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Two relevant research articles

Week Fourteen

Qualitative Research in Creating and Evaluating Community-Based Interventions

Group 3 presentation

Greene, J. C. (2000). Understanding social programs through evaluation. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 981-1000). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Fine, M., Weis, L., Weseen, S., & Wong, L. (2000). For whom? Qualitative research, representations, and social responsibilities. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 107-132). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Two relevant research articles

Qualitative Research and Social Policy

Group 4 presentation: Rist, R. C. (2000). Influencing the policy process with qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.) (pp. 1001-1017). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Reason, P., & Heron, J. (1995). Co-operative inquiry. In J. A. Smith, R. Harré, & L. V. Langenhove (Eds.), *Rethinking methods in psychology* (pp.122-142). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Two relevant research articles

Week Fifteen

Poster presentations of clinic interview findings