

# Common Misconceptions about Qualitative Research

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# TODAY

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

- Documented in literature
- And personally experienced

Q&A.

ORS Resources.

# Qualitative Inquiry - Review

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- 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."*

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- 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*

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- 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."*

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- 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.*”

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- 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?

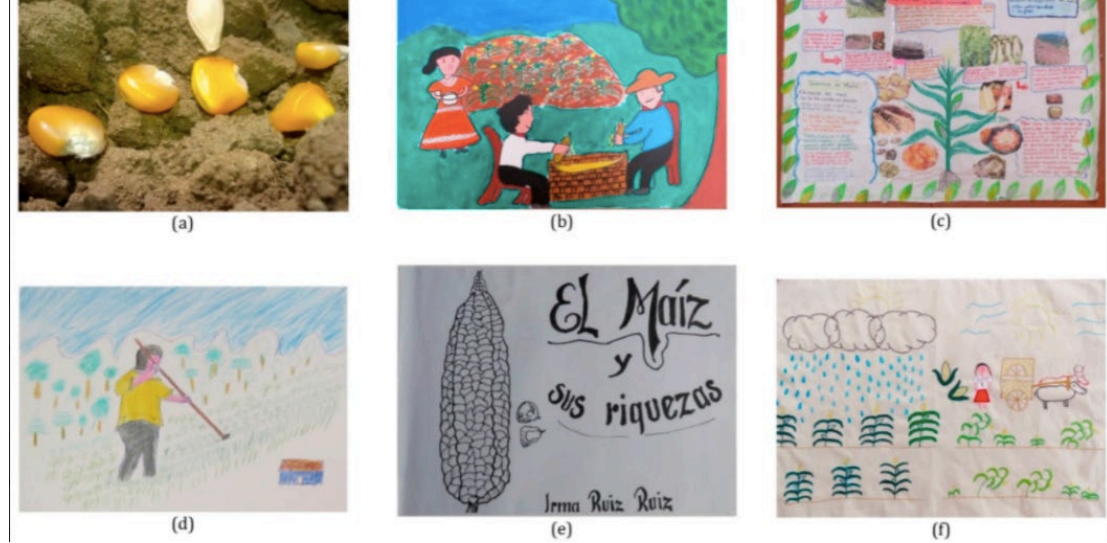


# Misconception #6: *"You should be coding 'this' way."*

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- 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."



Rivera Lopez et al. (2018)

- 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

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- 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

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Dr. Matthew Kelly

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

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Other Questions?

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