

The Essential Human Component in Qualitative Research

16 Articles Highlighting Various Ways the
Human Component is a Necessary & Unique
Ingredient in Qualitative Research Methods

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The contents of this compilation include a selection of 16 articles appearing in *Research Design Review* from 2014 to 2023 that highlight the various ways that the human component is a necessary and unique ingredient in qualitative research methods. The human component manifests itself in many ways, from the philosophical or paradigm orientation of the researcher to the integrity of the research that stems from prioritizing context and meaning, diversity and inclusion, nonverbal communication, and allotting sufficient time to derive useful outcomes. These articles represent a small sampling of the articles in *RDR* devoted to qualitative research and design. Excerpts and links may be used, provided that the proper citation is given.

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The Transcendence of Quality Over Paradigms in Qualitative Research

A graduate course in qualitative research methods may be framed around discussions of the particular theoretical or philosophical paradigms – belief systems or world view – that qualitative researchers use in varying degrees to orient their approach for any given study. And, indeed, if the instructor is using popular texts such as those from Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (2018) or John Creswell and Cheryl Poth (2018), students would be learning first about the different implications and approaches associated with various paradigm orientations, followed by (or along with) the corresponding methodological considerations.



There have been over the years debates in the academic qualitative research community about how best to identify and talk about these paradigms as well as quality concerns related to conducting research based around any one of these belief systems. In the broadest sense, the most oft-discussed paradigms in qualitative research are: postpositivism – often allied with a more quantitative approach where the emphasis is on maintaining objectivity and controlling variables in order to approximate “reality”; constructionism – in which the belief is not hinged to one objective reality but multiple realities that are socially constructed based on subjective meanings; and critical theory – where the focus is on bringing about social change for the marginalized or oppressed (e.g., issues related to racism, classism, or sexism) by way of a localized, fully collaborative approach.

It is these underlying paradigm orientations that fuel further discussions concerning what it means to conduct a “quality” qualitative study. Clara Hill’s “consensual qualitative research” – that is grounded somewhere between postpositivism and constructivism, and prescribes a highly-specific method – is just one example.

It is not at all clear, however, that the researcher needs a paradigm-bound research design where one set of criteria pertains to one orientation but not to another. As important as a theoretical or philosophical orientation may be to serving as the foundation to a qualitative research effort, it need not be tied to the quality measures the researcher utilizes in the actual *doing* of the research. In fact, the quality aspects of a research design should transcend, or at least be a separate discussion from, the consideration of paradigms. Regardless of the philosophical thinking that supports the approach, all qualitative research necessitates an implementation that maximizes the study’s credibility, analyzability, transparency, and ultimate usefulness to the research team, the

end users, as well as the research community as a whole. This type of quality framework is discussed more fully [here](#).

As discussed many times in this blog and elsewhere, qualitative research is complex and deserving of a varied and complex debate on any number of aspects. This complexity, however, unites us in our commitment to building quality components into our research designs so that all of us – no matter our theoretical/philosophical understanding of what it means to engage qualitative research – can realize our objectives.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2018). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

[Image captured from <http://appalachianson.wordpress.com/2013/09/16/join-hands-unite-the-riot/> on 26 February 2014.]

Social Constructionism & Quality in Qualitative Research Design



If you haven't already, I strongly encourage you to take a look at [Kenneth Gergen's](#) video on ["Social Constructionist Ideas, Theory and Practice."](#) In it, Dr. Gergen provides an overview of how social constructionists think and how such thinking can (and should) apply to real-world matters. Social constructionism is not one thing, not one theory or approach, but rather a "creative resource" that enables a new, expanded way of talking and thinking about concepts. Indeed, it might be said that a constructionist view is one

where all so-called "realities" are conceptual in nature, a product of our own personal "baggage" (values) and the relationship we have with the object of our experience (e.g., a person, a product, an event).

In this way, a social constructionist orientation is devoid of the notions pertaining to "truth," objectivity, and value neutrality; embracing instead the idea that "truth" is elusive while objectivity and value neutrality simply weaken our ability to look at and think about things from a multiplicity of perspectives that ultimately enriches our understanding and moves us toward new positive outcomes. Qualitative research design from a constructionist mindset, for instance, might lead to new methods of inquiry, or perhaps a greater emphasis on storytelling and the participant-researcher relationship in narrative research.

Social constructionism and qualitative research is a natural marriage, wedded by a mutual respect for the complexities of the human experience and the idea that any one facet of someone's life (and the researcher's role in exploring this life) intertwines with (contributes to) some other facet. That, as human beings we can't be anything other than intricately involved together in the construction of our worlds. We can see how fundamental this is to qualitative research by just looking at the ["10 Distinctive Qualities of Qualitative Research"](#) which includes the essence of constructionism such as the:

- Absence of "truth"
- Importance of context
- Importance of meaning
- Participant-researcher relationship
- Flexibility of the research design

The question remains, however, whether this marriage – between social constructionism and qualitative research – can survive alongside a “framework” intended to guide research design down a path that ultimately leads to useful outcomes. Is a framework that helps guide the researcher to quality outcomes compatible with the creative thinking of the social constructionist? Absolutely. Not only can this alliance *survive* a quality approach to research design, but it can also actually *thrive*.

The **Total Quality Framework (TQF)*** is one such approach. Like social constructionism itself, it is an approach that is not prescriptive in nature but rather a high-level way of thinking about qualitative research design. The TQF aids the researcher in designing and implementing qualitative research that is credible, analyzable, transparent, and ultimately useful to those who sponsor the research as well as those who may look to adapt the research to other contexts. In doing so, the TQF asks the researcher to think carefully about design-implementation considerations such as: the range of people who are included (and excluded) from participation, researcher training and data gathering techniques, analytical and reflective processes, and the transparency of the reporting. Importantly, the TQF does *not* ask the researcher to compromise the critical foundation on which qualitative research is built, i.e., its distinctive qualities that celebrate complexity, multiplicity, flexibility, diversity, “irrationality” and contradiction.

Quality considerations walk hand-in-hand with social constructionism (and many theoretical and philosophical orientations), you might even say that they need each other. A quality approach is driven by the researcher’s understanding and utilization of the socially constructed world (e.g., use of language, the imbalance of power) while the social constructionist ultimately requires research outcomes that are useful.

***Roller, Margaret R., & Lavrakas, Paul J. (2015). Applied Qualitative Research Design: A Total Quality Framework Approach. New York: Guilford Press.**

Image was captured from: <http://malefeminist.tumblr.com/post/32889041868>

Qualitative Research: Prioritizing Participant's Individuality

A thread that runs through many of the 300+ articles in *Research Design Review* has to do with maintaining participant integrity in qualitative research. In a nutshell, the idea is that researchers owe it to their participants as well as to the quality of their research outcomes to perceive each participant as a unique individual who offers distinctive contributions to the research objectives. Regardless of the qualitative method (in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observational research), qualitative studies begin with a personal approach to recruitment, followed by data collection directed by a devoted interest in each participant. Researchers are attentive to how each participant responds to interview or discussion questions, behaves in the research environment, and the cues that provide a contextual understanding of each individual's lived experience.



Maintaining the integrity of each participant does not stop after data collection. Equally important is the preservation of each individual in the early stages of analysis, especially when developing codes. This is because code development is based on each participant's unique meanings and experiences. For example, qualitative researchers are not necessarily interested in building codes solely around the *words* individuals use to describe an experience or attitude. This is illustrated in an excerpt from [an article in RDR on "thick meaning"](#):

For example, in an IDI [in-depth interview] study with cancer patients, many participants may have talked about their "relationship" with their physician and the importance of the patient-doctor "relationship" to their overall comfort level with treatment...Importantly, however, [the IDI] will not be coded based on whether... "relationship" was mentioned in response to any particular question, but rather the coding will reflect the complete context of the individual. It may happen, for example, that the interview participant talked a lot about the patient-physician relationship at the beginning of the interview but then steered away from this as the interview, and the participant's contemplation, progressed. Indeed, the participant may have come to identify the relationship with the family, not the physician, as being the biggest contributor to a positive experience with treatment, upending the participant's earlier definition of "relationship" as well as the role of the physician.

In addition to this article on "thick meaning," four other articles in *RDR* are noteworthy for the exceptional focus on prioritizing each participant's individuality.

“Qualitative Data Analysis: The Unit of Analysis” — The importance of selecting a unit of analysis that is broad and contextually rich in order to derive meaning in the data and ensure quality outcomes.

“The Limitations of Transcripts: It is Time to Talk About the Elephant in the Room” — Transcripts, like CAQDAS (computer-assisted qualitative data software), are simply a tool that convert “the all-too-human research experience that defines qualitative inquiry to the relatively emotionless drab confines of black-on-white text.” More discussion is needed on how to use transcripts.

“The Qualitative Analysis Trap (or, Coding Until Blue in the Face)” — A goal of qualitative analysis is not to deconstruct the data into bits and pieces but to focus on “‘living the data’ from each participant’s point of view” and to “fully internalize each participant’s relationship to the research question.” Like transcripts and CAQDAS, coding is simply a tool.

“Respondents & Participants Help Us, Do We Help Them?” — Researchers are obligated “to collect data, record responses, and then enter into the analysis with a deep sense of indebtedness, with the goal of discovering and telling the participant’s story. Everything we do is ultimately about the people who help us so that we can try to help them.”

A Holistic Approach to Qualitative Analysis



When conducting a qualitative analysis of in-depth interview (IDI) and focus group discussion data, the first step is to maintain the completeness of each case or research event. This means developing and maintaining a holistic understanding (including the contextual nuances) pertaining to each individual in an in-depth interview study and each group of participants in focus group research. In this analytical approach, the researcher is centered on the entirety of each lived experience or group of experiences related to the phenomena under investigation and specific research objectives. And in this spirit, the researcher is *not* concerned with how to disentangle the data, e.g., by looking at word frequencies or using Post-it Notes. **Coding until blue in the face**, particularly in the beginning phase of analysis, has the potential effect of “slicing and dicing” participants’ lived experiences thereby weakening their unique contributions to the research study.

A holistic approach to analysis acknowledges that (1) these unique contributions to our research are central to why we conduct qualitative research and (2) importantly, qualitative researchers owe it to their participants — who have given so much of themselves for our purposes — to maintain the integrity of their lived experiences.

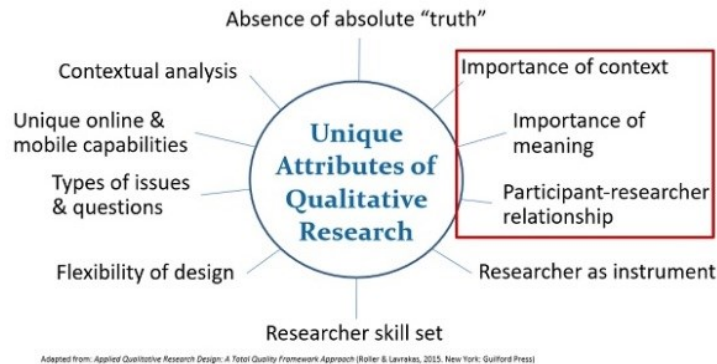
How does the researcher do this?

At the conclusion of each IDI or focus group discussion, the interviewer or moderator should reflect on their understanding of what was learned from the participant(s). To do this, the researcher will use their notes and the **audio and/or video recording** of the session. It is useful to use Excel or something similar to log the key takeaways associated with the research objectives. By doing this exercise after each IDI or group discussion, the researcher is absorbing a complete “picture” of each participant’s or group’s attitudes, behaviors, and experiences. From there, the researcher can look across participants or groups to contrast and compare.

Crucially, however, the researcher is not necessarily contrasting and comparing simply based on the use of terminology or other obvious, manifest content. Instead, the researcher considers the entirety of what they have learned about each individual or group of participants as revealed in a combination of obvious, subtle, and contextual interconnections within the data.

This holistic approach begins in the beginning — before transcripts and coding — and, with concerted effort, is maintained throughout the analysis process.

The Three Dominant Qualities of Qualitative Research



Among the [10 distinctive attributes associated with qualitative research](#), there are three that essentially encompass what it means to use qualitative methods – the importance of **context**, the importance of **meaning**, and the **participant-researcher relationship**. In fact, one could argue that these constitute the three dominant qualities of qualitative research in that they help to define or otherwise contribute to the essence of the remaining seven attributes. The “absence of absolute ‘truth’,” for instance, is an important aspect of qualitative research that is closely associated with the research (in-depth interview, focus group, observation) environment where the dominant attributes of context, meaning, and participant-researcher interactions take place. As stated in a [November 2016 Research Design Review article](#), the “absence of absolute ‘truth’”

refers to the idea that the highly contextual and social constructionist nature of qualitative research renders data that is, not absolute “truth” but, useful knowledge that is the matter of the researcher’s own subjective interpretation.

Similarly, there is a close connection between the “researcher as instrument” attribute and the three dominant qualities of context, meaning, and the participant-researcher relationship. A [July 2016 RDR article](#) described the association this way:

As the key instrument in gathering qualitative data, the researcher bears a great deal of responsibility for the outcomes. If for no other reason, this responsibility hinges on the fact that this one attribute plays a central role in the effects associated with three other unique attributes – context, meaning, and the participant-researcher relationship.

Other distinctive characteristics of qualitative research – having to do with skill set, flexibility, the types of questions/issues that are addressed (such as sensitive topics, the inclusion of hard-to-reach population segments), the involved nature of the data, and the online and mobile capabilities – also derive relevance from the three dominant attributes.

Having the necessary skill set, for instance, is important to discerning contextual influences and potential bias that may distort meaning; the particular topic of an interview and type of participant create contextual nuances that impact meaning; online and mobile qualitative research modes present distinct challenges related to context, meaning, and the participant-researcher relationship; and, of course, context and meaning supply the fuel that add to the “messiness” of qualitative data.

Of the three dominant attributes, the relationship between the participant and the researcher (the interviewer, the moderator, the observer) has the broadest implications. By sharing the “research space” (however it is defined), participants and researchers enter into a social convention that effectively shapes the reality – the context and the meaning – of the data being collected. This is particularly true in the in-depth interview method when “power dynamics” (Kvale, 2006) within the interview environment creates the possibility of “a one-way dialogue” whereby “the interviewer rules the interview” (p. 484), or there is a power struggle in which both participant and researcher attempt to control what is said or not said.

With few exceptions (e.g., [qualitative content analysis](#)), a social component, as determined by the participant-researcher relationship, is embedded in qualitative research methods regardless of mode (face-to-face, online, phone), resulting in dynamics that establish the context and meaning of the data along with the ultimate usefulness of the outcomes. The three dominant attributes – associated with context, meaning, and the participant-researcher relationship – are deeply entangled with each other and together cast an effect on the entire array of distinctive qualities in qualitative research.

Kvale, S. (2006). Dominance through interviews and dialogues. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(3), 480–500.

Beyond the Behavior-plus-“why” Approach: Personal Meaning as Insight

Researchers are desperate to understand behavior. Health researchers want to know what leads to a lifetime of smoking and how the daily smoking routine affects the quality of life. Education researchers examine the behavior of model teaching environments and contemplate best practices. Psychologists look for signs of social exclusion among victims of brain injuries. Marketing researchers chase an elusive explanation for consumer behavior, wanting to know product and service preferences in every conceivable category. And, if that were not enough, researchers of all ilk, to a lesser or greater extent, grapple with an often ill-fated attempt to predict (and shape) behaviors to come.



But researchers have come to appreciate that behavior is not enough. It is not enough to simply ask about past behavior, observe current behavior, or capture in-the-moment experiences via mobile. Behavior only tells part of a person’s story and, so, researchers passionately beef-up their research designs to include “why” — focusing on not just *what* people do but *why* they do it. **“Why,” of course, is often phrased as “what,” “how,” or “when” questions** — “What was going on at the time you picked up your first cigarette?” — but, whatever the format, the goal is the same, i.e., to get beyond behavior and understand the motivations, the thinking (conscious or not) that ultimately lead to certain actions.

All of this would be fine and good except that the behavior-plus-“why” approach often fails. Many researchers have been pursuing the explanation and prediction of behavior because the bubbles of the “ah ha!” moments burst upon subsequent new revelations in human behavior.

The behavior-plus-“why” approach fails because it is a transactional approach to understanding the human experience. It reduces what people do — smoke cigarettes, teach in a certain way, show signs of social exclusion, purchase Coke over Pepsi — and their motivations to a stimulus-response arrangement — My parents smoked, so I became a smoker; I experimented with teaching methods until I found something that worked; as a brain-injury victim, I feel socially isolated because people treat me differently; I buy Coke products because I grew up in Atlanta.

The behavior-plus-“why” transactional approach falls short of true insight because it doesn’t account for personal meaning. It doesn’t account for the fact that each individual

associates their own personal meaning to any given behavior or thought. Yet personal meaning is what researchers strive for to honestly understand what lies beneath behavior or a construct of interest.

- What does the experience of smoking cigarettes mean to you? How does it make you feel? Who do you smoke with? How does it define your sense of being?
- How do you know that a teaching method is “working”? What does it make you think about? What does it mean to you when you feel “success”?
- What does “social exclusion” mean to you personally? How does it manifest itself? What are the ramifications you experience from “social exclusion”? What would you change, if you could, and how would that make things “better”?
- What part of you is satisfied by purchasing Coke products? What role does it play in your life, and how does this role relate to other aspects of your life?

Going beyond the behavior-plus-“why” approach is something I teach in focus group training. In a recent workshop with corporate employees, I tried to instill the idea that there is personal meaning behind every participant comment. At the conclusion of moderator role playing, a trainee expressed her frustration when she asked someone in her group of employees to suggest improvements to the office environment. To the trainee’s horror, the participant suggested adding a water slide to the workplace to provide an element of “fun.” A water slide? Rather than exploring the personal meaning of a water slide for this particular person, the trainee just ended the group discussion wondering to herself why anyone would want a water slide at the office. What she didn’t know – but then learned – is that it was not a water slide that this person necessarily wanted at the workplace as much as the positive feelings associated with a water slide. It was these positive associations and dimensions that the participant wanted in the work environment that just happened to be articulated as “water slide.”

Finding personal meaning takes time. It requires concentrated time with research participants to explore and understand their behavior and motivations through their words; exploring what those words mean to them and how those words capture the personal meaning of the thoughts conveyed. Finding personal meaning also takes time (and creativity) during analysis and interpretation of outcomes, particularly when many participants are involved.

Such an effort expends valuable time, energy, and resources. But it is certainly better than coming away from the research only to recommend that the client add water slides to the workplace.

Image captured at: <http://www.healthychild.net/health-articles/choosing-the-right-water-slide-rentals/>

Contextual Analysis: A Fundamental Attribute of Qualitative Research



One of the **10 unique or distinctive attributes of qualitative research** is contextual, multilayered analysis. This is a fundamental aspect of qualitative research and, in fact, plays a central role in the unique attributes associated with data generation, i.e., **the importance of context, the importance of meaning, the participant-researcher relationship**, and **researcher as instrument** —

“...the interconnections, inconsistencies, and sometimes seemingly illogical input reaped in qualitative research demand that researchers embrace the tangles of their data from many sources. There is no single source of analysis in qualitative research because any one research event consists of multiple variables that need consideration in the analysis phase. The analyzable data from an in-depth interview, for example, are more than just what was said in the interview; they also include a variety of other considerations, such as the context in which certain information was revealed and the interviewee–interviewer relationship.” (Roller & Lavrakas, pp. 7-8)

The ability — the *opportunity* — to contextually analyze qualitative data is also associated with basic components of research design, such as sample size and **the risk of relying on saturation** which “misguides the researcher towards prioritizing manifest content over the pursuit of contextual understanding derived from latent, less obvious data.” And the defining differentiator between a qualitative and quantitative approach, such as **qualitative content analysis** in which it is “the inductive strategy in search of latent content, the use of context, the back-and-forth flexibility throughout the analytical process, and the continual questioning of preliminary interpretations that set qualitative content analysis apart from the quantitative method.”

There are many ways that context is integrated into the qualitative data analysis process to ensure **quality analytical outcomes and interpretations**. Various articles in *Research Design Review* have discussed contextually grounded aspects of the process, such as the following (each header links to the corresponding *RDR* article).

Unit of Analysis

“Although there is no perfect prescription for every study, it is generally understood that researchers should strive for a unit of analysis that retains the context necessary to derive meaning from the data. For this reason, and if all other things are equal, the qualitative researcher should probably err on the side of using a broader, more contextually based unit of analysis rather than a narrowly focused level of analysis (e.g., sentences).”

Meaning of Words

“How we use our words provides the context that shapes what the receiver hears and the perceptions others associate with our words. Context pertains to apparent as well as unapparent influences that take the meaning of our words beyond their proximity to other words [or] their use in recognized terms or phrases...”

Categorical Buckets

“No one said that qualitative data analysis is simple or straightforward. A reason for this lies in the fact that an important ingredient to the process is maintaining participants’ context and potential multiple meanings of the data. By identifying and analyzing categorical buckets, the researcher respects this multi-faceted reality and ultimately reaps the reward of useful interpretations of the data.”

Use of Transcripts

“Although serving a utilitarian purpose, transcripts effectively convert the all-too-human research experience that defines qualitative inquiry to the relatively emotionless drab confines of black-on-white text. Gone is the profound mood swing that descended over the participant when the interviewer asked about his elderly mother. Yes, there is text in the transcript that conveys some aspect of this mood but only to the extent that the participant is able to articulate it.”

Use of Recordings

“Unlike the transcript, the recording reminds the researcher of how and when the atmosphere in the [focus] group environment shifted from being open and friendly to quiet and inhibited; and how the particular seating arrangement, coupled with incompatible personality types, inflamed the atmosphere and seriously colored participants’ words, engagement, and way of thinking.”

[Roller, M. R., & Lavrakas, P. J. \(2015\). *Applied qualitative research design: A total quality framework approach*. New York: Guilford Press.](#)

The Qualitative Analysis Trap (or, Coding Until Blue in the Face)



There is a trap that is easy to fall into when conducting a thematic-style analysis of qualitative data. The trap revolves around coding and, specifically, the idea that after a general familiarization with the in-depth interview or focus group discussion content the researcher pores over the data scrupulously looking for anything deemed worthy of a code. If you think this process is daunting for the seasoned analyst who has categorized and themed many qualitative data sets,

consider the newly initiated graduate student who is learning the process for the first time.

Recent dialog on social media suggests that graduate students, in particular, are susceptible to falling into the qualitative analysis trap, i.e., the belief that a well done analysis hinges on developing lots of codes and coding, coding, coding until...well, until the analyst is blue in the face. This is evident by overheard comments such as “I thought I finished coding but every day I am finding new content to code.”

Coding of course misses the point. The point of qualitative analysis is not to deconstruct the interview or discussion data into bits and pieces, i.e., codes, but rather to define the research question from participants’ perspectives and derive underlying themes that connect these perspectives and give weight to the researcher’s interpretations and implications associated with the research question under investigation.

To do that, the researcher benefits from an approach where the focus is not as much on coding as it is on “living the data” from each participant’s point of view. With this in mind, the researcher (the interviewer or moderator) begins by taking time after each interview or discussion to record key takeaways and reflections; followed by a complete immersion into each interview or discussion (from the audio/video recording and/or text transcript) to understand the participant’s nuanced and intended meaning. A complete absorption (understanding) of each interview or discussion prior to code development allows the researcher to fully internalize each participant’s relationship to the research question, taking into consideration that: 1) not everything a participant says has equal value (e.g., a “side conversation” between the interviewer and participant on a different topic, an inappropriate use of words that the participant subsequently redefines); 2) participants may contradict themselves or change their mind during the interview/discussion which is clarified with help from the interviewer/moderator to establish the participant’s intended meaning; and 3) the tone or emotion expressed by the

participant conveys meaning and is taken into account to aid in the researcher's understanding.

This big picture sets the stage for code development and the coding of content. But now coding is less about the deconstruction of interview or discussion data and more about ensuring that each participant's lived experience related to the research question is intact and not lying unconscious in the qualitative analysis trap. Coding is simply a tool. A good thing to remember the next time you begin to feel blue in the face.

Image captured from: <http://learningadvancedenglish.blogspot.com/2016/04/until-you-are-blue-in-face.html>

Member Checking & the Importance of Context



A **social constructionist orientation to qualitative research** leans heavily on many of the unique attributes of qualitative research. Along with the absence of “truth,” the importance of meaning, the participant-researcher relationship, and flexibility of design, context plays an important role as the social constructionist researcher goes about collecting, analyzing and interpreting, as well as reporting qualitative data. As depicted in the **Total Quality Framework**, the phases of the research process are connected and support each other to the extent that the integrity of the contextually-rich data is maintained throughout.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) are often cited for their discussion of “member checks” or “member checking,” one of five approaches they advocate toward adding credibility to qualitative research. The authors describe the member check as “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314) because it requires the researcher to go back to participants (e.g., by way of a written summary or transcript, in-depth interview, group discussion) and gain participants’ input on the researcher’s data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions. This, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), allows the researcher to “assess intentionality” on the part of the participant while also allowing participants the “opportunity to correct errors” and/or give additional information, among other things.

Member checking has become a component in many qualitative research designs over the decades; however, it has also been the subject of much controversy. These criticisms range from pragmatic and practical aspects of member checking — e.g., Morse (2015) talks about the “awkward position” that member checking places on the researcher when a participant does not agree with the analysis, leaving the researcher in a quandary as to *how or if* to alter the analysis and interpretation — to concerns for the potential emotional harm or burden inflicted on participants (Candela, 2019; Morse, 2015; Motulsky, 2020), to issues of quality and data integrity — for example,

“Investigators who want to be responsive to the particular concerns of their participants may be forced to restrain their results to a more descriptive level in order to address participants’ individual concerns. Therefore, member checks may actually invalidate the work of the researcher and keep the level of analysis inappropriately close to the data.” (Morse et al., 2002, p. 16)

An integral consideration associated with data quality and member checking goes back to the importance of context. When interview and focus group participants share their lived experiences with the researcher(s), it is within the context of the interview and discussion environments that are defined by a myriad of factors, including the participant-researcher relationship (e.g., rapport), the research topic and interview/discussion guide, the mode, the time of day, the “mood,” and any number of other details that contribute to the particular responses — *and the contextual nuances of these responses* — that a researcher collects from a participant at any moment in time. As a result, the idea of going back to participants at a different point in time, within a different environment — that is, in a different context — and expecting them to think and respond as they did in the original interview/discussion is unreasonable.

An effective member checking technique that gains participants’ intentionality while *also maintaining context* is a question-answer validity approach during the research event. Question-answer validity is

“A form of member checking by which the in-depth interviewer or focus group moderator paraphrases interviewees’/participants’ comments to confirm or clarify the intended meaning. This technique also enables the interviewer to ascertain whether a participant has interpreted the interviewer’s question as it was intended.” (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, p. 361)

This in-the-moment, question-answer technique strengthens the validity of the data within the data-gathering environment, while also achieving three key goals of member checking: “It provides the opportunity to assess intentionality”; “It gives the [participant] an immediate opportunity to correct errors of fact and challenge what are perceived to be wrong interpretations”; and “It provides the [participant] the opportunity to volunteer additional information” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314).

The importance of context and its role in quality outcomes permeates qualitative research design. Member checking by way of the question-answer validity technique is one of the many approaches that helps to preserve the contextual integrity of qualitative data, leading to thematic analyses that deliver useful interpretations and recommendations.

Candela, A. G. (2019). Exploring the function of member checking. *The Qualitative Report*, 24(3).

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

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- Roller, M. R., & Lavrakas, P. J. (2015). *Applied qualitative research design: A total quality framework approach*. Guilford Press.**

Exploring Human Realities: A Quality & Fair Approach

The following incorporates modified excerpts from [Applied Qualitative Research Design: A Total Quality Framework Approach](#) (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, pp. 2-3).

As the channel by which researchers explore the depths of human realities, qualitative research has gained prominent status that is accelerating over time as quantitatively trained mentors in academia are increasingly asked to assist in students' qualitative research designs, and as the volume of published works in qualitative research aggressively grows (cf. Charmaz, 2008; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011; Silverman, 2013). Even psychology, a discipline that has traditionally dismissed qualitative research as “subjective” and “unscientific,” has come of age with slow but continued growth in the field of qualitative psychology (cf. Wertz, 2014). These advances have given rise to a vibrant array of scholars and practitioners who harbor varying perspectives on how to approach qualitative research.

Quality
Fairness

These differing perspectives are best exemplified by the [paradigm debates](#) among qualitative researchers. The focus of these debates is on the underlying belief or orientation the researcher brings to any given qualitative study. In particular, these discussions center on the philosophical constructs related to the nature of reality (ontology) and that of knowledge (epistemology). It is the researchers' sometimes divergent views on the presence and extent of a “true” reality—for example, whether it is the (post)positivism view that there is a single objective reality that can be found in a controlled scientific method, or the constructivism–interpretivism paradigm that emphasizes the idea of multiple realities existing in the context of social interactions and subjective meanings—as well as the source of this knowledge—for example, the dominant role of the researcher in [critical theory](#)—that have fueled an ongoing dialogue concerning paradigms within the qualitative research arena.

And yet, regardless of the philosophical or theoretical paradigms that may guide researchers in their qualitative inquiries, qualitative researchers are united in the fundamental and common goal of unraveling the convoluted and intricate world of the human experience.

The complexities of the human experience present unique challenges to qualitative researchers who strive to develop research designs that result in contextual data while incorporating basic standards of good research. To that end, many qualitative researchers,

routinely focus their attention on the importance of methodically rigorous data collection practices and verification checks (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002); well-thought-out procedures and analytic rigor (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006; Berg & Lune, 2012), and frameworks that promote critical thinking throughout the research process (Levitt, Motulsky, Wertz, Morrow, & Ponterotto, 2017; Roller & Lavrakas, 2015).

By transcending the paradigm debates, a quality approach to qualitative research fosters the essential element of fairness while maximizing the ultimate usefulness of the research. Fairness means giving participants a fair voice in the research. A “fair voice” is not a small q positivist-Big Q non-positivist issue (see Braun & Clarke, 2022) but rather **the researcher’s quality approach to data collection and analysis that gives careful consideration to the scope of the sample design, researchers’ skills that prioritize inclusion, ongoing reflexivity, and other quality research strategies that embrace diversity in our participants and our methods.**

A quality approach that promotes fairness to explore the complexity of human realities is a non-debatable goal of the qualitative researcher.

Atkinson, P., & Delamont, S. (2006). Rescuing narrative from qualitative research. *Narrative Inquiry*, 16(1), 164–172. <https://doi.org/10.1075/ni.16.1.21atk>

Berg, B. L., & Lune, H. (2012). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences* (8th ed.). Boston: Pearson.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). Toward good practice in thematic analysis: Avoiding common problems and be(com)ing a knowing researcher. *International Journal of Transgender Health*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/26895269.2022.2129597>

Charmaz, K. (2008). Views from the margins: Voices, silences, and suffering. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 5(1), 7–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780880701863518>

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Levitt, H. M., Motulsky, S. L., Wertz, F. J., Morrow, S. L., & Ponterotto, J. G. (2017). Recommendations for designing and reviewing qualitative research in psychology: Promoting methodological integrity. *Qualitative Psychology*, 4(1), 2–22. <https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000082>

Lincoln, Y. S., Lynham, S. A., & Guba, E. G. (2011). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences, revisited. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 97–128). Sage Publications.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2011). *Designing qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Morse, J. M., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olson, K., & Spiers, J. (2002). Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 1(2), 13–22.

Roller, M. R., & Lavrakas, P. J. (2015). *Applied qualitative research design: A total quality framework approach*. New York: Guilford Press.

Silverman, D. (2013). What counts as qualitative research? Some cautionary comments. *Qualitative Sociology Review*, 19(2), 48–55.

Wertz, F. J. (2014). Qualitative inquiry in the history of psychology. *Qualitative Psychology*, 1(1), 4–16.

Giving Voice: Reflexivity in Qualitative Research



Homegoing, the debut novel by Yaa Gyasi, is a moving tale of slavery and its translation across generations. At one point, we read about a descendant in Ghana who teaches history and on the first day of class stumbles on a lesson concerning “the problem of history.” The problem he refers to is that history is constructed from stories that are handed down over time yet “We cannot know which story is correct because we were not there.” He goes

on to say to his students

We believe the one who has the power. He is the one who gets to write the story. So when you study history, you must always ask yourself, Whose story am I missing? Whose voice was suppressed so that this voice could come forth? Once you have figured that out, you must find that story too. From there, you begin to get a clearer, yet still imperfect, picture. (pp. 226-227)

The month of February* (Black History Month) and Juneteenth (the day commemorating the emancipation of enslaved African Americans) seems like an appropriate time to reflect on power and what we as researchers are missing in our studies of vulnerable and marginalized segments of the population. After all, with the exception of participatory research, we are typically the ones who control the design and implementation of data collection along with the analysis, interpretation, and reporting of the findings.

Reflection on our role in the research process should be common practice. But our reflection takes on new meaning when our participants are those with the weakest voice. As we sit down with our reflexive journal and consider our prejudices and subjectivities (by asking ourselves the kinds of questions outlined in **this *RDR* article**), researchers might do well to pay particular attention to their assumptions and beliefs – What assumptions did I make about the participant(s)? and How did my personal values, beliefs, life story, and/or social/economic status affect or shape: the questions I asked, the interjections I made, my listening skills, and/or my behavior?

Few, Stephens, and Rouse-Arnett (2003) address this in their discussion on interviewing Black women on sensitive topics. As Black women themselves, they felt no less obligated to reflect on their status.

As Black feminist qualitative researchers, we are particularly attuned to how we become the research instruments and the primary sieves of re/presentation in our exploration of Black womanhood. (p. 213)

By way of this reflection, the authors make recommendations toward the interviewing of Black women on sensitive topics, including such concepts as “contextualizing self in the research process.” The authors also come to the realization that “the diversity of Black experience has been misrepresented [by] traditional family studies orientations,” asserting that “the persistent matrix of intersectionality that Black women endure, succumb, and overcome” cannot be fully addressed if “researchers debate and deconstruct out of existence the ‘critical essences’ (i.e., race, class, and gender) that matter to Black women’s existence and survival in this world” (p. 213).

So, take another look at your reflexive journal. Take another look at your research with the vulnerable and marginalized. And, if not already there, consider adding these queries – so well put by Gyasi – to your journal: Whose story am I missing? Whose voice has been suppressed? Whose story do I need to seek out to help me gain a clearer, more complete picture of the people and the phenomenon I hope to illuminate through my research? How, indeed, have I used my power as a researcher to give center stage to the “critical essences” of society’s minority voices?

*This article was originally posted in February 2019.

Few, A. L., Stephens, D. P., & Rouse-Arnett, M. (2003). [Sister-to-sister talk: Transcending boundaries and challenges in qualitative research with Black women](#). *Family Relations*, 52(3), 205–215.

Gyasi, Y. (2016). *Homegoing: A novel*. Vintage.

Image captured from: <https://jennymackness.wordpress.com/category/connectedcourses/>

Resisting Stereotypes in Qualitative Research

One of the most meaningful concepts in qualitative research is that of “Othering”; that is, the concept of “us” versus “them” that presents itself (knowingly or not) in the researcher-participant interaction. Othering is an important idea across all qualitative methods but it is in the in-depth interview (IDI) – where the intensity of the interviewer-interviewee relationship is pivotal to the quality of outcomes – where the notion of Othering takes on particular relevance. As discussed [elsewhere](#) in *Research Design Review*, the interviewer-interviewee relationship in IDI research fosters an “asymmetrical power” environment, one in which the researcher (the interviewer) is in a position to make certain assumptions – and possibly misperceptions – about the interviewee that ultimately play a role in the final interpretations and reporting of the data. It is this potentially uneven power relationship that is central to [reflexivity and the reflexive journal](#) (which is discussed repeatedly in this blog).



In 2002, *Qualitative Social Work* published an article by [Michal Krumer-Nevo](#) titled, [“The Arena of Othering: A Life-Story with Women Living in Poverty and Social Marginality.”](#)¹ This is a very well-written and thought-provoking article in which Krumer-Nevo discusses the “sphere of power relationships” in IDI research, an environment in which the interviewer and interviewee are continuously swapping their power status – “One minute I was the ‘important’ interviewer, with power and status...and the next minute I would find myself facing a closed door” (p. 307). In this way, the Other (or “us”) in Othering moves back and forth, with both interviewer and interviewee attempting to socially define and/or control the other.

From the perspective of the interviewer, it takes more than keen listening skills (something discussed many times in this blog, esp., in [October 2013](#) and [April 2011](#)) to delve beyond unwarranted assumptions concerning the interviewee, it *also* takes a keen sense of one’s own stereotypical “baggage.” In her IDI research with women “living in poverty,” Krumer-Nevo found herself in a stereotypical trap by way of “seeing [the interviewee] as a victim” rather than seeing the strengths and contributions made by the impoverished participant. By succumbing to the notion of victim, Krumer-Nevo was defining this interviewee in a flat, one-dimensional, stereotypical way instead of perceiving the complex, multi-dimensional character she was.

Krumer-Nevo is right when she talks about the need to resist Othering in IDI research and, particularly, the tendency to define our research participants by our own socio-

economic or theoretical framework which blinds us to the reality of the very subject matter we want to know more about. Shedding our stereotypes means putting “aside the normative knowledge acquired from one’s membership in a society, a family, an educational system of values [because] the values, positions, and attitudes acquired in the process of socialization...work against the ability to understand those who live in poverty [or in situations unfamiliar to us]” (p. 316).

Resisting stereotypical beliefs – resisting being the Other to the other – is one critical step all researchers can take in their IDI research towards achieving quality data outcomes and credible, useful interpretations of the findings.

¹Krumer-Nevo, M. (2002). The arena of othering: A life-story study with women living in poverty and social marginality. *Qualitative Social Work*, 1(3), 303–318.

Image captured from: <http://glamdollteaston.wordpress.com/2013/07/02/what-are-the-dangers-of-stereotyping-people/>

Gathering Quality Ethnographic Data: 3 Key Considerations

The following is a modified excerpt from *Applied Qualitative Research Design: A Total Quality Framework Approach* (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, pp. 204-206).



Data Gathering is one of two broad areas of the **Total Quality Framework Credibility component** that affects all qualitative research, including ethnographic research. There are three primary aspects concerning the gathering of data in ethnography that require serious consideration by the researcher in the development of the study design. To optimize the measurement of ethnographic data, and hence the quality of the outcomes, researchers need to pay attention to:

- How well the observers have **identified and recorded all the information** (e.g., verbal and nonverbal behavior, attitudes, context, sensory cues) pertinent to the research objectives and constructs of interest. A well-developed **observation guide and observation grid** can assist greatly in this effort. Not unlike the development of an in-depth interview or discussion guide, the ethnographer seeks to identify those observable events—including the specific individuals (or types of individuals), the verbal and nonverbal behaviors, attitudes, sensory and other environmental cues—that will further the researcher's understanding of the issues. During the design development phase, the researcher might isolate the observations of interest by:
 - Looking at earlier ethnographic research on the subject matter and/or with similar study populations.
 - Interviewing the clients or those who have requested the research to learn everything they know about the topic and their past work in the area.
 - Consulting the literature or other experts concerning the behaviors and other occurrences associated with particular constructs.
 - “Shagging around” (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982) the observation site(s) to casually assess the environment and begin to learn about the participants.
- **Observer effects**, specifically—
 - **Observer bias**, that is, behavioral and other characteristics (e.g., personal attitudes, values, traits) of the observer that may alter the observed event or bias their observations. For example, an observer as a **complete participant** would bias the observational data if there was an attempt to “educate”

participants on a subject matter for which the observer had personal expertise or knowledge.

- **Observer inconsistency**, that is, an inconsistent manner in which the observer conducts the observations that creates unwarranted and unrepresentative variation in the data. For example, an **on-site nonparticipant observer** conducting in-home observations of the use of media and technology would be introducing inaccuracies in the data by observing and recording the use of television and gaming in some households but not in others where television and gaming activities took place.
- **Participant effects**, specifically, the extent to which observed participants alter a naturally occurring event, leading to biased outcomes. This is often called the **Hawthorne effect**, whereby the people being observed, either consciously or unconsciously, change what is being measured in the observation because they are aware of the observer. For example, an ethnographer conducting an overt, **on-site passive observation** of teaching practices in a school district would come away with misleading data if one or more school teachers deviated from their usual teaching styles during the observations in order to more closely conform with district policies.

LeCompte, M. D., & Goetz, J. P. (1982). Ethnographic data collection in evaluation research. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 4(3), 387–400.

Roller, M. R., & Lavrakas, P. J. (2015). *Applied qualitative research design: A total quality framework approach*. New York: Guilford Press.

Focus Group Data Analysis: Accounting for Participant Interaction

The following is a modified excerpt from [*Applied Qualitative Research Design: A Total Quality Framework Approach*](#) (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, pp. 153-154).

The complexity of the substantive data resulting from the focus group discussion method is no small matter. For one thing, more and richer data sources typically stem from focus group research compared to the in-depth interview (IDI) method. Video recording, for instance, is more common in the in-person focus group method and requires special attention because it may include important nonverbal information beyond the substance of the words that were spoken. For example, the participants' facial expressions may provide valuable insights in addition to what is manifest by the spoken words themselves.



A more profound contributor to the complexity of processing group discussion research is not a data source but a component that is the essence of the method: that is, the interactivity of the group participants. It is *participant interaction* that sets this method apart from the one-on-one IDI approach. From the perspective of the [*Total Quality Framework*](#), complete and accurate analyses and interpretations of group discussions are achieved by expending the necessary time and effort to consider the group members' interactions with each other and with the moderator.

Whether it is by way of video or transcriptions of the discussions, the dynamic interaction fostered by the group environment has the potential of offering the analyst views of the research outcomes that go beyond what is learned from the process of developing codes and identifying themes. Grønkjær et al. (2011) talk about analyzing “sequences of interactions” (e.g., “adjacency pairs,” a comment from one participant followed by a response from another participant), stating that the analysis “revealed a variety of events that impacted on content” (p. 27). Other suggested means of studying group interaction include the template from Lehoux et al. (2006), discussed in [*“Accounting for Interactions in Focus Group Research”*](#); asking relevant questions during the analysis, such as, “How did the group resolve disagreements?” (Stevens, 1996, p. 172); and, as espoused by Duggleby (2005) and complementing the work of Morrison-Beedy, Côté-Arsenault, and Feinstein (2001), the integration of participants' interactions into the written transcripts, for example, incorporating both

verbal and nonverbal behavior that more fully explains how participants reacted to each other's and the moderator's comments.

Whereas online discussions produce their own transcripts (i.e., the text is captured by way of the online platform), the in-person and telephone modes require one or more transcriptionists to commit the discussions to text. Roller and Lavrakas (2015, p. 35) discuss the necessary qualities of transcriptionists and the importance of embracing them as members of the research team. In addition to the six required characteristics outlined by Roller & Lavrakas, the transcriptionist in the group discussion method must be particularly attentive to the dynamics and interactivity of the discussion. To accomplish this complete task, the requirements of the transcriptionist need to go beyond their knowledge of the subject matter and extend to their know-how of the focus group method. Ideally, the person transcribing the discussions will be someone who has at least some experience as a moderator and can readily isolate interaction among participants and communicate, by way of the transcripts, what the interaction is and how it may have shifted the conversation. For example, a qualified transcriptionist would include any audible (or visual, if working from a video recording) cues from the group participants (e.g., sighs of exasperation or expressions of acceptance or agreement) that would provide the researcher with a clearer understanding of the dynamic environment than simply the words that were spoken.

Duggleby, W. (2005). What about focus group interaction data? *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(6), 832–840.

Grønkjær, M., Curtis, T., de Crespigny, C., & Delmar, C. (2011). Analysing group interaction in focus group research: Impact on content and the role of the moderator. *Qualitative Studies*, 2(1), 16–30.

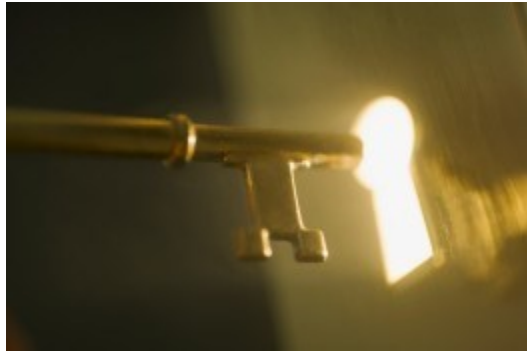
Lehoux, P., Poland, B., & Daudelin, G. (2006). Focus group research and “the patient’s view.” *Social Science & Medicine*, 63(8), 2091–2104. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2006.05.016>

Morrison-Beedy, D., Côté-Arsenault, D., & Feinstein, N. F. (2001). Maximizing results with focus groups: Moderator and analysis issues. *Applied Nursing Research*, 14(1), 48–53. <https://doi.org/10.1053/apnr.2001.21081>

Roller, M. R., & Lavrakas, P. J. (2015). *Applied qualitative research design: A total quality framework approach*. New York: Guilford Press.

Stevens, P. E. (1996). Focus groups: Collecting aggregate-level data to understand community health phenomena. *Public Health Nursing*, 13(3), 170–176. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/8677232>

A Key to Qualitative Data Analysis: Time



An earlier article in *Research Design Review* discusses **Fast and Slow Thinking in Research Design**. The emphasis here is on the idea that “there is no easy solution to the discovery of how people think” and researchers’ methods need to incorporate an approach that allows for “an appreciation of the many facets of the human mind – the irrational and rational, emotional and cognitive.”

Although not explicitly discussed in this earlier article, “discovery of **how people think**” in a *slow, considered manner* is the ultimate goal of qualitative data collection and the qualitative data analysis process. By definition, the **unique attributes of qualitative research** require a thoughtful, measured course of action. Two of these attributes — **the importance of context and the importance of meaning** — play a significant role in mandating the researcher’s unwavering attention.

An unspoken yet key ingredient in qualitative research methodology, and particularly qualitative data analysis, is time. That is, taking the necessary time to absorb **each participant’s contribution to the research objectives** and then deeply examine the similarities and differences across participants. And yet, many researchers often feel compelled to speed up their analysis.

When deciding to conduct a qualitative research study, the timeline should be given careful consideration. Qualitative researchers owe it to the integrity of their research results (and ultimately to the users of the research) to fully accept and embrace the amount of time required for analysis. And likewise, to resist demands (from others or self-inflicted) that serve to unduly accelerate the analysis process.

Researchers are encouraged to build in the time required to conduct a complete analysis and to document the estimated time requirement when developing the research design. Let it be known from the outset that additional weeks or months may be needed in the timeline to allow for a thorough and meaningful analysis at the completion of data collection.

Qualitative data analysis — understanding the contextual meanings of how people think (individually and collectively) — takes time. Embrace it. Enjoy it. It is why we conduct qualitative research in the first place.

Leaving Time in Research Design to Discover Dissonance

Many conversations about research design revolve around the common goal of maximizing response. Whether it is a quantitative or qualitative study, researchers routinely make design decisions that they hope will mitigate refusals and better the odds of obtaining reliable and valid responses to research questions. Survey and qualitative – focus group, in-depth interview, ethnographic – researchers carefully consider such things as sampling, mode, screening, survey request/recruiting, and overall questionnaire/guide design along with question wording, all with the desire to derive useful outcomes based on a sound approach to maximizing the actual number of people responding to the research request *as well as the integrity of the responses received to the research questions.*



An important dimension in research design is time; that is, the length of time it will take the survey respondent or qualitative participant to complete his/her involvement with the research. In this regard, questionnaire length (and complexity) is an obvious area of attention in survey research, with researchers such as Jepson, et al. (2005), Deutskens, et al. (2004), and others demonstrating an indirect relationship between length (e.g., in pages or word count) and response rate – the longer the questionnaire length, the lower rate of response. Likewise, qualitative researchers think about how much time to ask of focus group participants or the acceptable length for an in-depth interview with a given target population, knowing that a group discussion of more than two hours, or an interview longer than 30 minutes or an hour, may lead to a particularly high number of refusals depending on the topic and participant type.

With this in mind, researchers often look for ways to condense the research into manageable, sometimes “bite size” portions that make the research request less daunting to would-be participants and simplify research questions to relieve response burden to otherwise complex content. This is especially true these days as researchers are compelled to find more contrived, abbreviated design solutions for the mobile mode.

Massaging the research design to increase response from the people of interest is fundamental to delivering useful outcomes. But what do researchers give up when they reduce the length and complexity of their research to digestible portions?

Anyone who has conducted an in-depth research interview (IDI) will tell you that people are often not able to articulate their thinking when first asked to respond to questions on a subject matter. This may be because it is a topic they rarely think about (i.e., it is relatively unimportant in the scheme of their lives) or the researcher may have asked about some aspect of the topic that the participant had never thought about before being asked. In either case, it is not unusual for IDI participants to voice one attitude at the beginning of the interview only to contradict this thought at some point later in the interview after reflecting and refining their attitudes on the issue. It is these contradictions and inconsistencies that fuel the interviewer's pursuit of a less tangled understanding of the participant's perspective.

But identifying contradictions – revealing cognitive and emotional dissonance – and untangling inconsistencies take time. It requires a commitment to survey and qualitative research designs that places a high priority on *building in* sufficient time to gain honest knowledge of the research participant. These are research designs that are less focused on reducing questionnaire or interview guides to bite-size consumables and instead highly centered on design considerations that foster the discovery of dissonance and help the researcher unravel – gain a clearer picture of – participants' attitudes.

Is this a challenge in today's fast-paced, time-constrained culture? Yes, absolutely. But this is a discussion that researchers should be having nonetheless. A discussion that addresses the question: How can researchers maximize response while also maximizing meaning that comes from time spent to discover and understand the realities of participants' thinking?

Jepson, C., Asch, D. A., Hershey, J. C., & Ubel, P. A. (2005). In a mailed physician survey, questionnaire length had a threshold effect on response rate. *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology*, 58(1), 103-105.

Deutskens, E., De Ruyter, K., Wetzels, M., & Oosterveld, P. (2004). Response rate and response quality of internet-based surveys: An experimental study. *Marketing Letters*, 15(1), 21-36.

Image captured from: <http://polyliving.net/2013/04/polyamory-and-emotional-dissonance/>