



*Article***Symposium Introduction - Issues of Validity: Behavioral Concepts, Their Derivation and Interpretation**

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Abstract

Qualitative inquiry that commences with the concept, rather than the phenomenon itself, is subject to violating the tenet of induction, thus is exposed to particular threats of invalidity. In this symposium, using the examples of the concepts of uncertainty, trust, vulnerability and suffering, and interview and videotaped data, we discuss strategies to maintain the inductive thrust, and hence validity, during data analysis. The authors present the use of a skeletal framework and scaffold as techniques to “frame” the concept, while, at the same time, continuing to further develop the concept.

Keywords: Concept development, qualitative validity, induction, video analysis, scaffold, skeletal framework, trust, uncertainty, vulnerability, suffering

Introduction

The anathema of qualitative inquiry is essentially one of validity. While much literature exists on methods of controlling or countering threats to validity when the goal of research is description, these problems are compounded when one begins working abstractly. Not only is the research most at risk with this research approach, but these problems have been poorly addressed in the methodological literature.

We consider the goal of qualitative science twofold: first to develop concepts in order to get a better grasp on the phenomena represented by the concepts themselves and, second, from this, to develop generalizable and valid theories. We believe it is these tasks, essentially those involving interpretation, conceptualization and abstraction, that will eventually provide qualitative inquiry with a legitimate place in the social sciences, and ultimately earn its respect and contribution to know

Presently, ways of controlling threats to inductive validity with descriptive research are only partially successful. Briefly, strategies used prior to commencement of data analysis such as bracketing (Janesick, 2000, pp.390-391), rejection of preconceived theoretical frameworks (Miles & Huberman, 1994), or techniques of verification used during the conduct of inquiry (Meadows & Morse, 2001) demand that inquiry begins from the data with each new project, and do not facilitate the incremental compounding of research projects. Post hoc methods to ensure validity, such as testing results by implementation and subsequent inquiry (Morse, 2001), while important, occur too late in the process of inquiry to expedite the process of inquiry itself. While these checks and balances guide inquiry towards validity, there is a need to explore the problem of conducting qualitative inquiry using concepts as a starting point within the analytic processes of induction/deduction, and to bring to the fore ways that more advanced inquiry implicitly proceeds. In particular, there is a need to explore the problem in instances in which inquiry begins with a concept itself, rather than commencing with basic description. Thus, in this symposium, we have attempted to identify and to formalize techniques by which inductive processes may be sustained (and deductive tendencies avoided) when commencing inquiry at the conceptual level. We use four research projects to illustrate these solutions.