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Qualitative Data Analysis and Interpretation in Counseling Psychology: Strategies for Best Practices
Christine J. Yeh
University of San Francisco
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This article presents an overview of various strategies and methods of engaging in qualitative data interpretations and analyses in counseling psychology. The authors explore the themes of self, culture, collaboration, circularity, trustworthiness, and evidence deconstruction from multiple qualitative methodologies. Commonalities and differences that span across approaches are explored. Implications for how researchers address qualitative data analysis and interpretation in counseling psychology training and research are discussed.

When we were first asked to write an article on qualitative analysis and interpretation for The Counseling Psychologist (TCP), we were certainly honored but simultaneously overwhelmed by the variability and enormity of the topic. Although there has been a recent surge of interest in qualitative methodologies in counseling psychology (see the 2005 Special Issue: Knowledge in Context: Qualitative Methods in Counseling Psychology Research, Journal of Counseling Psychology), as well as a call for alternative and mixed method approaches to research in counseling psychology (Hanson, Creswell, Plano Clark, Petska, & Creswell, 2005; Haverkamp, Morrow, & Ponterotto, 2005; Haverkamp & Young, 2007 [TCP, special issue, part 3]; Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Mattis, & Quizon, 2005), qualitative research has a well-established history in various fields such as anthropology, education, sociology, and psychology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Hence, the potential for cross-disciplinary qualitative applications to counseling psychology research is quite substantial.

Qualitative research refers to languaged versus numbered data (Polkinghorne, 2005) in which the purpose is to “build a complex, holistic picture” (Creswell, 1998, p. 15) and to describe and clarify “human experience as it appears in people’s lives” (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 137). There is an effort to understand, appreciate, and portray the processes and means that people use
to give meaning to their own and other’s behavior (Patton, 1984). In qualitative research, knowledge is not passively observed, but actively constructed and evolves from an exploration of people’s internal constructions (Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold, 1999). Sources of qualitative data include interviews, focus groups, observations, documents, and artifacts from multiple approaches (Morrow, & Smith, 1995; Polkinghorne, 2005; Swagler & Ellis, 2003). Creswell contended that these approaches can be organized in the following traditions: phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, biography, and case study. Moreover, such methods and sources reflect different kinds of research questions, philosophical leanings, data collection strategies, and analytic practices (Polkinghorne, 2005; Ponterotto, 2005a).

The multiple possibilities for qualitative research in counseling psychology have not yet been realized. According to Ponterotto (2005a), only 10% of counseling psychology programs require a qualitative research course for doctoral students and a median percent of approximately 10% of doctoral dissertations in counseling psychology are qualitative. Moreover, while many counseling psychology programs offer qualitative research courses, they are almost always elective courses (Ponterotto, 2005b). Although publications in counseling psychology have revealed numerous articles using consensual qualitative research (CQR; Yeh, Ma, et al., 2005), grounded theory (GT; Gomez et al., 2001; Timlin-Scalera, Ponterotto, Blumberg, & Jackson, 2003), discovery-oriented approach (Ladany, Hill, Corbett, & Nutt, 1996; Yeh, Inman, Kim, & Okubo, 2006), as well as other methods, there is still an overrepresentation of quantitative studies in counseling psychology research (Ponterotto, 2005a). This lack of qualitative research is surprising because the applied, self-reflective, and multicultural aspects of counseling psychology offer numerous analytical possibilities with ethnographic (Suzuki et al., 2005), narratological (Hoshmand, 2005), action-oriented (Young, Valach, & Domene, 2005), phenomenological (Wertz, 2005), and case study (Morrow, Allen, & Campbell, 1997) approaches, to mention a few.

This article presents an overview of various strategies and methods of engaging in qualitative data interpretations and analyses in counseling psychology. Reviewing all analytic perspectives is beyond the scope of our intention, and there are numerous excellent sources that provide such information (see Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Creswell, 2002; Creswell, Hanson, Clark, & Morales, 2007 [TCP, special issue, part 3]; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Rather, this article is unique from recent publications in qualitative research (see 2005 JCP special issue) in that we seek to explore central themes in qualitative analysis and interpretation that cut across various paradigms of understanding (viz., self, culture, collaboration, circularity, trustworthiness, and evidence deconstruction).
These ideas have not been explored in detail in previous work and are summarized in Table 1 according to eight qualitative analysis methods: case study, CQR, discovery oriented approach, ethnography, GT, narrative, participatory action research (PAR), and phenomenological approaches to qualitative research. Definitions of the eight qualitative analytic methods are provided in Table 2.

This article is also unique because it seeks to help researchers and trainees understand similarities and differences in techniques as well as philosophical perspectives across analytic strategies and approaches. Table 1 expands on Creswell’s (1998) previous tables describing five traditions in qualitative inquiry and design (a difference in the current article is that we distinguish between a single case study and other “case study” methods employing multiple cases such as CQR and GT). In addition, this article differs from previous work because we also seek to identify and discuss “best practices” in qualitative research and delineate such ideas across approaches using a case example.

We believe that qualitative research is a genuine and valid method of inquiry and does not need to be paired with, or compared with, quantitative research in order to be legitimized. (For more on quantitative issues and analysis, see Carter 2006a, 2006b [TCP, special issue, parts 1 & 2]).

To help readers understand each of the concepts we are discussing, we will provide a brief definition at the beginning of each section. Furthermore, at the end of each section, we will discuss a case example from Christine Yeh’s research program with a diverse, low-income sample in the lower east side of New York City to illustrate our concepts.

**SELF**

In qualitative research, investigators cannot be separated from the research process; they are inextricably linked: We refer to this practice and approach as “self.” Specifically, understanding how selves shape, create, and construct evidence, interpretations, analysis, and theory in qualitative analysis has been discussed in terms of *self-awareness* (Creswell, 1998), *subjectivity* (LeCompte & Preissle, 2003), and *reflexivity* (Morrow, 2005) and requires situating one’s position in the research. Examining researcher’s positions, self-identities and self-constructions lend themselves to important choices in how the data are created and represented. According to Hoshmand (2005):

Depending on the researcher’s own identity and intentions, a particular identity or voice may be represented. Such choices depend on the purpose of the
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis Strategies</th>
<th>Case Study</th>
<th>Consensual Qualitative Research</th>
<th>Discovery Oriented</th>
<th>Grounded Theory</th>
<th>Ethnography</th>
<th>Long Interview</th>
<th>Narrative</th>
<th>Phenomenological</th>
<th>Participatory Action Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Self-location addressed as it impacts relationship with case; role of power and position explored</td>
<td>Address biases; acknowledge expectations; discuss as a research team; and acknowledge biases in discussion section</td>
<td>Awareness of traps that bypass, hide, or lose what needs to be discovered (can be akin to checking biases)</td>
<td>Memo writing to address assumptions, hunches, insights, self-locations; open discussion of how the self is situated</td>
<td>Exploration of social identities; field notes relating observations, ideas, and experiences; and diaries for personal reflections</td>
<td>Use of self as an instrument (self-location, and biases) similar to grounded theory</td>
<td>Reflexivity; humility; and awareness of power dynamics</td>
<td>Bracketing; use journals to explore insights, reflections, and preconceptions</td>
<td>Self-location intensely explored and addressed as related to participants experiences. Role of power and position</td>
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<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Situated in context or location</td>
<td>Inclusion of researchers from similar cultural group</td>
<td>Inclusion of researchers from similar cultural group</td>
<td>Inclusion of researchers from same cultural group</td>
<td>History of ethnographic approaches across cultures; cultural portraits</td>
<td>Inclusion of researcher from same cultural group to facilitate cultural categories that might be missing from the literature</td>
<td>Importance of cultural self-awareness</td>
<td>Understanding meaning and experience from a cultural perspective</td>
<td>History of focus on marginalized and oppressed communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Intense and in-depth relationship with individual (may be over time)</td>
<td>Member check</td>
<td>May use member check</td>
<td>Member check</td>
<td>Community members to confirm or disconfirm data; translate findings into action</td>
<td>May use member check</td>
<td>Seek to empower and provide voice to community; intense relationship with individual</td>
<td>Extensive collaboration with community throughout research process; social change</td>
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<tr>
<td>Circularity</td>
<td>Examination of theory and questions throughout process</td>
<td>Stability check</td>
<td>Continual examination of categories and themes</td>
<td>Theoretical saturation; repeated comparisons</td>
<td>Theoretical sensitivity</td>
<td>Layers of analysis: moving from utterance to categories through re-examination of utterances, categories</td>
<td>Theory building is ongoing</td>
<td>Seek to understand essence and meaningful experience</td>
<td>Theoretical sampling</td>
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<td>Trustworthiness</td>
<td>Cross-analysis</td>
<td>Use of auditors; member check; address and discuss bias; data triangulation; and cross-analysis</td>
<td>Investigator triangulation; participant check; data triangulation; and cross-analysis</td>
<td>Investigator triangulation; repeated comparisons; member check; and data triangulation</td>
<td>Maintaining naive; participant confirmation; data triangulation; and cross-analysis</td>
<td>Data triangulation</td>
<td>Investigator triangulation; data triangulation; natural attitude; cross-analysis</td>
<td>Member involvement; data triangulation; community action</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deconstruction</td>
<td>Detailed description and discussion of themes; naturalistic generalizations; and assertions</td>
<td>Domains; categories; and cross-analysis</td>
<td>Repeated patterns; themes; and develop categories</td>
<td>Open coding; axial coding; selective coding; categories; subcategories; dimensions; and conditional matrix</td>
<td>Detailed description of the group; themes and interactional patterns</td>
<td>Utterances; themes; and categories</td>
<td>Storytelling; critical aspects of a story</td>
<td>Horizontalization; meaningful units; textual and structural descriptors; present essence</td>
<td>Participants validate interpretations and analyses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach</td>
<td>Defining Features</td>
<td>Key Citations</td>
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<td>Case study</td>
<td>A central feature of this method is the detailed and in-depth analysis of a single case or multiple cases over time through the use of multiple sources (interviews, observations, audiovisual materials).</td>
<td>Creswell, 2002; Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1995</td>
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<td>Consensual qualitative research</td>
<td>This is a constructivist approach (naturalistic, occurs between participant and researcher) with elements of postpositivism (quasi-statistics or numerical classification of results). A key feature of this approach is the consensus among multiple researchers and the use of an external auditor to bring in an objective perspective to the data set.</td>
<td>Hill, Knox, Thompson, Williams, Hess, &amp; Ladany, 2005; Hill, Thompson, &amp; Williams, 1997</td>
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<td>Discovery oriented</td>
<td>An exploratory method that employs an up close, in-depth, and naive study of a phenomenon to obtain information about a situation that is new, one that may not already be known, or predicted. It can be used with small as well as large samples, and a key feature of this method is its emphasis on consistency across cases and the use of consensus across multiple judges.</td>
<td>Mahrer, 1988; Mahrer &amp; Boulet, 1999</td>
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<td>Grounded theory</td>
<td>In grounded theory, researchers are not testing hypotheses, rather they are building theory from the raw data or extending an existing theory. Ideas and themes emerge from the data and are more closely connected with reality. Grounded theories, hence, “offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action.”</td>
<td>Fassinger, 2005; Strauss &amp; Corbin, 1998</td>
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<td>Ethnography</td>
<td>An approach in which the researcher engages in prolonged observation and immersion in the daily lives of a group. The groups’ behavior, customs, values, and interactions are studied in-depth and then are described and interpreted.</td>
<td>Bernard, 2002; Creswell, 1998; Suzuki, Ahlwalia, Mattis, &amp; Quizon, 2005</td>
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<td>Long interview</td>
<td>A constructivist approach concerned with cultural contexts and shared meanings rather than individual affective states. It employs a highly focused intensive interview process that allows the researchers to get in-depth information without repeated and prolonged use.</td>
<td>McCracken, 1988</td>
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(continued)
Moreover, Hoshmand (2005) argued that selves must be cognizant of power dynamics between participant and researcher (Polkinghorne, 2005), selves should not romanticize marginalized voices (Fine, 1992), and, using critical discourse theory, selves must balance political agendas with situational, historical, social, cultural, and linguistic analysis (Scheuer, 2003).

Prioritizing self-awareness is certainly not new in counseling psychology. Specifically, awareness of one’s own assumptions, values, and biases is not only a central tenant in theories about multicultural counseling competency (Roysircar, 2004), but literature has also advocated for cultural awareness in counseling practice, research, and training (e.g., Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). Similarly, one of the most critical aspects of conducting qualitative research involves recognizing how metatheoretical predispositions (e.g., conceptual assumptions) and our own personal

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TABLE 2. (continued)

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<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Defining Features</th>
<th>Key Citations</th>
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<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Central features include the “linguistic and structural characteristics of narrated text” and more recently the “meanings and relationships found in narratives as well as the social, historical, and cultural contexts of narratives” (Hoshmand, 2005, p. 179).</td>
<td>Hoshmand, 2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phenomenological</td>
<td>The emphasis is on describing the conscious/central meaning or essence of the lived experience of the phenomena (concept) under study. The reality/meaning of the phenomena is conceptualized within the consciousness of the individual.</td>
<td>Creswell, 1998, 2002; Moustakas, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1989</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participatory action research</td>
<td>Similar to other constructivist research methods, meaning is coconstructed between the researchers and the target population of the study in the participatory action research (PAR) paradigm. PAR, however, also involves the study participants as integral research collaborators.</td>
<td>Fine et al., 2002; Kidd &amp; Kral, 2005</td>
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</table>

study, the audience we want to address, the interaction between participant-selves and author-selves, and the praxis of interpretive communities (p. 184).
(e.g., cultural) and professional (e.g., educational background experiences) influence our choices of study, research questions, selection of participants, our interpretations, and subsequent theories (LeCompte & Preissle, 2003). Thus, we wanted to first present our backgrounds and discuss how they inform the writing of this article.

Christine Yeh

Yeh’s perspective, understanding, conceptualization, and approach to qualitative research are deeply connected with her cultural and educational background and experiences. As an Asian American woman of Taiwanese heritage, interdependence was a central aspect of her upbringing. Yeh was encouraged to see connections—in relationships, in ideas, and in experiences. It was these links and the patterns they created that informed her interactions and interpretations. Deconstructing knowledge and experience came as a natural and necessary process because she did not share many norms, assumptions, or meanings with the surrounding White dominant culture. Yeh’s cultural background fostered her strong interest in working with communities of color and finding questions and approaches that respectfully reflect their experiences. She had the honor of being mentored by Ken Gergen and Hazel Markus, who each offered constructivist and poststructuralist approaches to research. They both emphasized the importance of malleability in considering various approaches, designs, methods, and interpretations.

Arpana Inman

Hoshmand’s (2005) discussion of research identities and intentions resonate not only with Inman’s choices of research but also the voices that she has chosen to represent in her academic career. In 1996, having lived in the United States for 11 years, negotiating multiple identities as a minority created an impetus for her to examine these experiences in other South Asian women. It was the construction of a South Asian American cultural values conflict scale (Inman, Ladany, Constantine, & Morano, 2001) that first led her to qualitative research. To develop the scale, she interviewed South Asian women on their experiences of negotiating a bicultural identity and the potential conflicts experienced within this context (Inman, Constantine, & Ladany, 1999). While the scale yielded interesting results, it was through the qualitative data that she realized the hidden motives and multiple meanings underlying these women’s struggles. This awareness has led to important choices in her research inquiry and pull toward qualitative research. Inman has found that denying the contextualized experiences diminishes the significance of
symbolic, social, historical, and cultural aspects that play an important role in people’s lives.

Exploring our selves is an ongoing process that continues to evolve and influence our work. There is a Chinese proverb that says, “Two-thirds of what a person sees exists behind that person’s eyes” (Sodowsky & Johnson, 1994, p. 59), suggesting that reality or truth is relative and bound to perceptual deviations whereby individuals construct and deconstruct their own interpretations based on their social locations (e.g., ethnicity, race, geography, family, economic, political, educational, and spiritual) and their worldview, philosophy of life, or scheme. Thus, in conducting ethnographic research in counseling psychology, it is critical to analyze one’s social location and “social identities as part of interpretation and analysis” (Suzuki et al., 2005, p. 211).

Suzuki et al. recommended that researchers explore the potential effect of race, class, skin color, gender, personal and group history, social attitudes, and so forth prior to beginning, as well as throughout, the research process. Cultural self-awareness is critical because one’s background, minority status, or White privilege may be implicitly or explicitly used as a means of comparison of the cultural group under study. As in the case of racial identity in supervisory relationships (Cook, 1994), conducting qualitative analysis may serve to foster a deeper exploration and understanding of one’s cultural values and norms through interaction and conducting work in a new community setting (LeCompte & Preissle, 2003). Beyond a researcher’s subjective social location, reflexivity, and experiences in conducting research become important elements in investigations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Thus, it follows that for a given set of data, how a participant describes his or her experiences and how a researcher interprets and analyzes these experiences are to a large extent based on one’s self-understanding.

For example, in CQR, self-exploration is conceptualized in terms of expectations and biases and is an important part of interpretation and analysis (Hill et al., 2005). Expectations refer to researchers’ beliefs that emerge from reading previous literature and inform research questions, whereas biases refer specifically to personal matters that make it difficult for the researcher to be objective when reacting to the data (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997). Biases may stem from a variety of places including demographics, theoretical orientations, and feelings about the topic (Hill et al., 2005).

Biases or prejudices are also addressed in phenomenological qualitative approaches. Specifically, procedures, known as epochs (see Wertz, 2005, for an in-depth description) are used to reduce bias in the research process. In the first epoche, prejudice about the topic is suspended while the interview is conducted with an open mind or natural attitude (Wertz, 2005). In the second epoche, the researcher empathetically reflects on the world of the participants to gain a firsthand perspective of their experiences. In the
latter parts of data analysis, the researcher may integrate insights and interrogate the data using previous theoretical positions (Wertz, 2005).

Being reflexive during the research process is an ongoing activity that may also involve memo writing as in GT (Fassinger, 2005), detailed field notes as in ethnographic techniques (LeCompte & Preissle, 2003), or journals as in phenomenological research (Wertz, 2005). In GT, memo writing entails depicting the growing “ideas, assumptions, hunches, uncertainties, insights, feelings, and choices the researcher makes as a study is implemented and as a theory is developed, providing means for making transparent the interpretive, constructive processes of the researcher” (Fassinger, 2005, p. 163). Whereas ethnographic field notes may document day-to-day activities, interactions, observations, and personal reactions. Bernard (2002) has recommended using a diary in addition to field notes to separate the personal emotions and reactions from the research observations. In phenomenological research, journals are used to document preconceptions, insights, and reflections, along with other parts of the analytic process such as naming themes, analyzing linguistic expressions, and deconstructing realities (Wertz, 2005).

Case Example: Yeh’s research group has been seeking to understand the process of cultural adaptation in Asian immigrant youths at a school near New York City’s Chinatown. This research has involved a multimethod and multi-informant approach. The concept of self as described in this section has been central to our work in that we assume that self-understanding is critical to our conceptualization, gathering, analysis and interpretation of data. Consistent with previous assumptions of self-awareness (LeCompte & Priessle, 2003; Suzuki et al., 2005), all of the members of Yeh’s research group were required to complete coursework exploring their reference group orientations (social class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion) during in-depth group interviews and lengthy journals. Next, as Yeh and her group first entered the community and school, they began by using ethnographic methods and visited and observed the school for several months (Bernard, 2002; Wertz, 2005). Each observer kept a detailed journal and field notes of her or his observations, insights, feelings, personal reactions, developing ideas of the site and the intended participants and informants (Bernard, 2002; Fassinger, 2005; Wertz, 2005). During data gathering, analysis, and interpretation, each member shared his or her own biases and expectations (Hill et al., 1997). These were discussed at regular meetings and integrated into our data interpretations.

CULTURE

Culture refers to the context-specific meanings and interpretations grounded within the perspective of a group. Qualitative research is not always, but may be, a multicultural process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), and
counseling psychology is becoming increasingly multicultural in focus (Sue & Sue, 2003). There is continuous cultural self-exploration and cultural comparisons on the part of the researcher. Moreover, cultural perspectives are critical to include in our construction and deconstruction of data and theory. In particular, qualitative research lends itself well to studying communities of color because people of color are not always represented in mainstream psychology assessments, constructs, and counseling psychology theory (Sue & Sue, 2003; Yeh & Hwang, 2000). However, these methodologies are not particular to examining the experiences of people of color alone. To allow for new theory development, many researchers have utilized qualitative analytic methods such as CQR, discovery-oriented approach, and PAR to unearth descriptive cultural meanings among White as well as non-White communities (Drost, 2005; Graziano, 2004; Inman, Yeh, Madan-Bahel, & Nath, 2007; Juntunen et al., 2001; Yeh 2004; Yeh, Ma, et al., 2005). Additionally, ethno-graphic approaches have historically been used in anthropology and education (as well as in many other disciplines) to explore the norms, values, practices, beliefs, interactions, emotions, relationships, and so forth of cultural groups as an alternative to other approaches that may not provide such an open method to discovering new meaning.

Given the increasing cultural diversity in the United States, achieving multicultural counseling competency has become a nationwide challenge for counselors. Furthermore, irrespective of one’s cultural background (White or people of color), understanding how self and identity evolve from an intersection of race, class, gender, and ethnicity; examining the multiple layers of consciousness that connect the personal to the cultural (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000); and identifying the multiple spaces that people occupy as these contexts influence the ongoing construction of daily lives have all made easy solutions impossible. For example, in the United States, social interactions often get interpreted through constructs of race and ethnicity (Outlaw, 1990) for all communities. However, the social encounters may differ for those who are from communities of color or dominant White communities (see Helms, 1990). Thus, regardless of one’s background, connecting the person to the culture becomes an important element of cultural competency. In the process of reflecting on their lives, experiences of person and culture can become intertwined and become dialectically revealed through language, cultural symbols, metaphors, affect, intentions, tone, and self-consciousness (Denzin, & Lincoln, 2000).

Language is arguably one of the important components of culture. It is impossible to understand the subtle nuances and deep meanings of another culture without understanding its language. Language is more than just a means of communication: it is one of the main sources of transmitting cultural beliefs as well as traditions, perceptions, and emotions, and it serves
as a source of identity and pride (Santiago-Rivera & Altarriba, 2002). Given the emphasis on spoken or written word in qualitative research, language and the manner by which it is communicated become important components within interpretation and data analysis.

For example, there are many emotion words in other languages that have no accurate translation in English that can pose challenges for data interpretation and analysis. For example, according to Russell (1991), the Japanese word *ijirashii* refers to the feeling related to seeing an admirable person prevail over a problem. In addition, the Bengali word *obhiman* can either mean pride (positive) or arrogance (negative). Thus, if used to refer to arrogance, then it can create sadness because of the insensitivity of the person who was arrogant. In our own research on South Asians’ 9/11 experiences (Inman et al., 2007), we found similar language nuances. For example, one of our participants used the word *mann*. In Hindi, *mann* is often used interchangeably to refer to heart, mind, consciousness, and soul. Thus, the phrase “Mann nahi karta” can mean “Don’t feel like it because I am not interested,” “My heart is not in it because of feeling sad,” or “I am bored because I have nothing to do.” In discussing complexities associated with translations, Hoshmand (2005) indicated that “language can illuminate or conceal narrative realities that have personal and political implications (p. 184).”

However, communication is far more than verbal speech and writing. Paralanguage such as gestures, glances, and changes in tone of voice are some aspects that alter or emphasize what people say and do. It has been suggested that at least 60% of what individuals communicate when talking directly with others is through paralanguage (Sue & Sue, 2003) This non-verbal communication provides a depth to the emotions underlying one’s experience and is often more important than what is being said orally.

Cultural contexts offer avenues for understanding emotions when they are not spoken and provide clues to meanings when answers are not pointed. For example, when interviewing Asian Indians about their experiences with cultural transmission (Inman, Howard, Beaumont, & Walker, 2007) and Asians and South Asians about coping with the World Trade Center Attacks (Inman et al., 2007; Yeh et al., 2006), responses were often indirect, circular, and told in the form of stories. While translations and transcriptions were a critical aspect of analysis for these interviews, the nuances of cultural practices and patterns of verbal and nonverbal communications were instrumental in crafting our evolving theories. For example, understanding how “saving face” influences Asian American relational interactions was critical in how we conceptualized emotional experiences and mental health.

Beyond language, the cultural environment in which people are raised may have significant effects on how they interpret the world around
them. Etic categories involve a classification according to some external system of analysis brought in by the visitor. It assumes an ultimate objective reality that is more important than cultural perceptions of the world. In contrast, emic categories involve a classification consistent with the manner in which members of a society classify their own world. Such cultural taxonomies inform little about objective reality, but provide insight in understanding how others perceive experiences through the filter of their own language and culture.

In our experiences in working with communities of color, we have found that entry into the community is strongly based on feelings of trust of the person and institution based within the community as well as the notion that “actions speak louder than words” (Inman et al., 2007). In counseling psychology, making a human connection is certainly underscored in practice, but this idea of entry as a person is also central to qualitative research. Such relational interconnectedness between researcher and participant can contribute to shared understandings and perspectives that foster accurate interpretations and meaningful theory building.

Understanding how to interpret cultural norms and ways of being in data analysis may entail involving researchers with similar cultural backgrounds (Juntunen et al., 2001; Yeh et al., 2004), with shared experiences (such as being the same generation; Kim et al., 2003), or with training in the culture being studied. Such connections ensure that multiple and alternative perspectives beyond those most explicit are incorporated, and seemingly ambiguous responses are deciphered culturally. Moreover, how cultural subtleties and distinctions are absorbed and understood must be explained by the researcher in the developing theory. If there are discrepancies between research team members in how to build such theory, these differences should be viewed through a cultural perspective. Researchers must be flexible and open-minded when considering and integrating various worldviews. Bernard (2002) referred to this as maintaining naivete in ethnographic research or “being someone who genuinely wants to learn a new culture (p. 344).”

Case Example: In our ongoing research with Asian immigrants, cultural context and language are inextricable aspects of the research process. Because we are working with a high-context culture (Sue & Sue, 2003), we have learned and continue to assume that cultural setting (home, school, Chinatown community, etc.) helps shape one’s identity, values, norms, relationship dynamics, mental health, coping patterns, and experiences with adaptation. It is through this lens that we underscore the malleability of acculturation. Second, language is a critical lens through which researchers can begin to explore and understand acculturative experiences (Altarriba & Santiago-Rivera, 1994). In our work, discussions about conceptualization, interpretation, and analysis are in English as well as Chinese so that key ideas and concepts are included. This is highlighted by our elaborate and in-depth
translation techniques (Bravo, Woodbury-Farina, Canino, & Rubio-Stipec, 1993) during which teams of bilingual translators meet and discuss each term, concept, and scale item that is used in the research program and agree on the best possible translation in terms of semantics and construct validity. These translations are then scrutinized and discussed by a separate group of bilingual translators and back translated from Chinese into English. Then, a final team reviews the back-translated product and the original translation and reaches consensus on the best possible interpretations based on cultural norms and practices. Finally, our use of ethnography, PAR, and grounded theory has provided an avenue for new cultural meanings to emerge that include, but are not limited to, spoken language.

COLLABORATION

Collaboration refers to the process in which a researcher enters a community in a way that maintains the integrity and humanity of the members of that particular group (Suzuki et al., 2005). Access to cultural groups’ norms and values does not necessitate group membership, but may involve collaboration with the community being researched. Numerous methods in qualitative data analysis and interpretation highlight the essential and intimate link between investigator and participant. For example, in naturalistic–ethnographic research, the researcher strives to collaborate with the research participant in all phases of the project in order to gain a more accurate understanding of relevant and meaningful experiences (Heppner et al., 1999). Many ethnographic approaches refer to the researcher as a participant–observer. According to Bernard (2002):

Participant observation is about stalking culture in the wild—establishing rapport and learning to act so that people go about their business as usual when you show up. If you are a successful participant observer, you will know when to laugh at what people think is funny; and when people laugh at what you say, it will be because you meant it to be a joke (p. 324).

In participant observation, there is an intimate connection with the participants that may parallel the working alliance with a client in a counseling relationship (Hoshmand, 1989).

Collaboration with the community being researched is also emphasized in narratological research methods in which group decision making is just as important as validating interpretations with participants. Collaboration with the community around interpretation of data can contribute to more balanced perspectives. Participant involvement in data interpretation is especially relevant when the cultures are unfamiliar in practice, language, beliefs, and norms (Hoshmand, 2005). Similarly, in CQR (Hill et al., 1997)
and GT (Fassinger, 2005), data analysis and interpretations often involve *member checking*. This procedure requires having research participants review evolving domains and theories emerging from the data to see if they reflect and resonate with the experiences of the members of the community. In ethnography, a form of member checking may involve having participants confirm or disconfirm the results of the data (Heppner et al., 1999).

The qualitative PAR model (e.g., Brydon-Miller, 1997) strives to develop ecologically valid and culturally responsive interventions that identify immediate needs and create systematic social change (e.g., Fine et al., 2002). In this paradigm, research and meaning are coconstructed by the researchers and the community being studied, and participants are considered to be integral research collaborators (Stringer, 1999).

In ethnographic approaches to counseling psychology, the role of the community becomes especially important when considering the implications of the findings. Suzuki et al. (2005) emphasized sharing the results with the community and exploring avenues for making the research applicable and meaningful to the collaborators. It is important to explore how the findings may translate into possible counseling interventions or programs (Inman et al., 2007; Yeh et al., 2006; Yeh, Ma, et al., 2004; Yeh, Okubo, et al., 2005) or how the work will give voice to traditionally marginalized communities (e.g., lower socioeconomic status individuals, women, people of color; Hoshmand, 2005). For example, critical ethnographers are not only investigators and community members, but also social justice advocates with political purpose who seek to empower and change the oppressed conditions of cultural communities (Creswell, 1998).

**Case Example:** Community collaboration in research extends beyond data collection assistance and validation of results. In Yeh’s current research in a low-income school for immigrant youths (Yeh et al., 2004; Yeh, Okubo, et al., 2005), PAR methods were used to incorporate participants’ perspectives throughout the research process. Using PAR, Yeh and her research team hired a group of Asian immigrant high school students as research collaborators who actively engaged in all aspects of the research project including the development of meaningful research questions, strategies for recruitment, discussing findings, and developing and implementing school programs. These students were selected after a lengthy application and interview process. They were paid (because they were low income and many had to quit their current positions) and earned school credits (they submitted a research report at the end of the semester). Because we wanted the collaboration to be reciprocally meaningful, the students were asked throughout the process to inform us of their interests. Hence, we developed several training opportunities for our collaborators including research training (conceptualization, data gathering, analysis, interpretation, report writing) as well as career and professional development (resume writing, interview skills, college applications and visits, finding internships, etc). We also collaborated with several members of the

school community including the assistant principal, several guidance counselors, parent coordinator, teachers, and the college counselor.

Collaboration is more than just asking for help from the community when needed. In our work, our collaborations have involved extensive discussions, shifts in perspectives and approaches, and extensive attempts at reaching consensus about our ideas. Community collaborators have been involved in developing our research questions, reading our interview questions for cultural construct validity, checking our findings for cultural accuracy, and trying to make sense of interesting aspects of our results. In particular, as we have developed prevention programs for Asian immigrant youths, our collaborators have been codeveloping and cofacilitating our programs and are deeply invested in the process (Fine et al., 2002).

CIRCULARITY

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges in writing this article is the notion of describing qualitative analysis and interpretation as separate from issues of conceptualization, data collection, design, and write-up. In attempting to achieve this, we are very cognizant that in qualitative research, one process is not distinct from the other. Circularity refers to the complexity, depth, and comprehensiveness of qualitative research as it emerges from its connectedness across researcher, method, analysis, and developing theory. They are all part of the intersecting whole that helps to capture and make meaning of the experience under study. In essence, qualitative research analysis is a circular, fluid, and ongoing process that requires examination and reexamination on multiple levels at different points in time.

Qualitative data analysis is a constant method of comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The circularity of qualitative data analysis is not necessarily something that occurs after the data are analyzed (and is then reanalyzed), rather, as Miles and Huberman (1994) discussed, these issues are “early steps in analysis” (p. 50). They contended that analysis is something that begins as the researcher sets the stage for the study and begins the process of creating a conceptual framework. They argued that early qualitative analysis requires “time to ponder” about the research questions, growing theory, methods, and forms of analysis.

Heppner et al. (1999) described qualitative data analysis as involving a reading and rereading of the data with the expectation of finding core ideas and deeper levels of meaning. It is an iterative process that involves an open-mindedness and flexibility to data collection sources throughout the entire research project (Polkinghorne, 2005; Suzuki et al., 2007 [TCP,
Data analysis is not viewed as the final stage of qualitative research but as part of a rotating cycle, which can offer spaces for collecting new and better data and can lead to preliminary reports and interpretations.

Interweaving analysis with ongoing theory building is central to GT methods (Fassinger, 2005) in which theory is created inductively through a simultaneous process of theory building, data collection, coding, conceptualization, and theorizing. During this iterative and inductive process of sampling and analysis, new data are integrated and compared until there are no more new categories or themes or there is “theoretical saturation (Fassinger, p. 157).” Strauss and Corbin (1990) referred to this process as “theoretical sampling” or sampling grounded in ideas that are conceptually relevant.

In the data analytic process, emergent domains and categories may be subject to a stability check as present in CQR analysis (Hill et al., 1997). During a stability check, raters use preexisting (yet unanalyzed) or new cases to test the appropriateness of growing themes and topics. Specifically, after raters reach consensus about an initial set of domains and categories, new cases are added to test the theoretical fit of the first round of analysis. This process may continue until the theory nears completion. Similarly, in PAR, data are examined and reexamined through the lenses of researchers as well as community members and changes are integrated in a continual, multilevel collaboration. Notions of circularity cannot be separate from ethnographic, discovery-oriented, long interview, or in-depth case-study approaches in which theory building, analysis, and interpretation are ongoing and malleable processes shaped by daily interactions and observations, personal insights, and shifts in viewpoints.

Case Example: The notion of circularity has greatly informed our research projects on Asian immigrants. Specifically, to address our assumption that cultural adaptation is a dynamic, nonlinear process, we incorporated an ecological systems theory (Brofenbrenner, 1979) that assumes individual’s direct reciprocal interactions with his or her social systems (peers, family, school, community, etc.) as well as movement across and between social systems. This multileveled conceptualization lends itself to the use of multiple informants that allow for multiple intersecting and circular perspectives. Hence, our research incorporated data from teachers, school, staff, parents, and peers in a series of rich and engaging focus groups.

Our research also incorporated multiple methods and approaches (PAR, GT, ethnography, focus groups, interviews, observations, surveys, school records, etc.) in order to allow for different sources of data and theory building. By integrating various methodologies, we are well positioned to read and reread the data with the expectation of finding new and deeper levels of
meaning (Heppner et al., 1999) as part of a rotating cycle (Polkinghorne, 2005). In particular, our use of GT offers opportunities for new theories to emerge from the multiple informants and cultural contexts (Fassinger, 2005).

VALIDITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

Validity/trustworthiness refers to the authenticity and consistency of interpretations grounded in data. One of the major issues surrounding validity is the link between method and investigation, with validity depending on the consistency within the data (e.g., internal validity) and relation of the study’s conclusions to the real world (e.g., external validity). This notion of validity has been characteristic of a positivistic paradigm with the view that data are essentially irrefutable. Alternatively, within the context of postmodernist thinking (e.g., postpositivism, interpretative/constructivist, and critical theory paradigms), all experiences are perceived as based in social realities and therefore validity “has to be assessed in relation to the purpose and circumstances of the research rather than a context independent property of methods of conclusions” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 86).

Qualitative research has employed multiple standards of “quality” commonly known as validity, rigor, trustworthiness, fairness, authenticity, and credibility (Morrow, 2005) based in three different research paradigms: namely, postpositivism, constructivism/interpretivism, and critical/ideological theory (Ponterotto, 2005a; Morrow, 2007 [TCP, special issue, part 3]). While standards for validity are closely aligned with each of these paradigms, and might look different for methods such as GT, CQR (based in postpositivism, constructivism/interpretative paradigms), or PAR (based on critical theory), it is important to note that these three approaches share certain worldviews resulting in an overlap in the criteria of validity (Patton, 2002). These include subjectivity and self-reflexivity, credibility and adequacy of data, interpretation of data, and consequential validity. We examine these general criteria identified in the literature that cut across these three paradigms and across research methodologies. For criteria specific to each paradigm, we would like to refer the reader to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), Patton, and Morrow.

Types of Validity Across Paradigms of Qualitative Research

Subjectivity and self-reflexivity. A major threat that has been identified within the context of all three paradigms of qualitative research is the researcher’s subjective influence on data gathering and analyzing processes.
(Maxwell, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Morrow, 2005). To limit or control for this threat, a common strategy used in different qualitative research methodologies (e.g., CQR, phenomenology, PAR) involves self-reflexivity (Rennie, 2004). Explaining key biases and how one will deal with them becomes an important aspect of maintaining fairness within the research process. Another strategy is to employ a research team or auditors, which is known as investigator triangulation (Denzin, 1978), as is evident in methodologies such as CQR (Hill et al., 2005), discovery-oriented approach (Mahrer, 1988), and phenomenology (Creswell, 1998). Auditors tend to provide alternative perspectives (e.g., theory triangulation; Denzin, 1978) to those of the investigator.

A related challenge with regard to subjectivity and the researcher being an insider to the culture is making sure that the data accurately represent the reality of the participant rather than that of the researcher. In such cases, the researcher can take a naive interviewer stance—get participant feedback (participant/member checks; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Maxwell, 1996). A third strategy is the use of method triangulation (Denzin, 1978) to counter researcher or research team biases. This might involve having two sets of research teams: one from within the culture and the other from outside of the culture who analyze the data. A comparison of the findings from these two research teams can help assess the integrity of the findings.

Credibility and adequacy of data. This element of “quality” that refers to the accuracy and completeness of the data has been greatly emphasized in both postpositivism and constructionist/interpretativist paradigms. Often, credibility and adequacy of data have been based in sample size with qualitative research sample sizes ranging from 3 to 100 transcripts (Mahrer, 1988; Morrow, 2005; Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997), with the magical number often being around 10–12 (Hill et al., 1997). Yet at other times data have been gathered until a point of saturation or redundancy (as in CQR, GT, and phenomenology) wherein new cases do not add any additional information to the findings.

It has been argued that the validity of a study based in qualitative data goes beyond sample size to include the quality and depth of interview data along with multiple points of evidence (Morrow, 2005). Denzin (1978) identified this as data triangulation. Data triangulation has often been used in methods such as GT, CQR, phenomenology, ethnographies, and case studies, and includes data sources such as interviews, field notes, participant checks, self-reflective journals, participant observations, and other artifacts that might help achieve multidimensionality to the data set. Such a strategy not only reduces the risk of chance associations, but without an
adequate integration of the different sources, an in-depth understanding of the contextual aspects of the participant’s experience of the phenomena may be diminished (Maxwell, 1996; Morrow, 2005).

Finally, data also need to be subject to discrepant evidence or negative cases (Erickson, 1986; Maxwell, 1996) to help understand the complexity of the phenomena under study and challenge the researchers’ preconceived notions or preliminary findings (Morrow, 2005). Through cross analysis (CQR; Hill et al., 2005), repeated comparisons (GT), or generating comparison tables (ethnography, discover-oriented approach; Creswell, 1998; Fassinger, 2005; Mahrer 1988), one is able to identify discrepant or disconfirming evidence and revise categories that might evolve to reflect the true experience of participants.

**Interpretation of data.** A third area that has received much attention within the three paradigms is adequacy of interpretations or the threat of imposing one’s own framework or meaning rather than understanding the perspective of the participant. This can evolve from not listening to the participant’s meanings, not being aware of bracketing one’s own framework, or asking leading, closed or short answer questions that limit a participant’s response (Maxwell, 1996). Because the researcher is immersed in the data throughout the research process (interviewing, transcribing interviews, listening to the tapes, reading transcripts, reading field notes, etc.), detailed notes or memos (as in grounded theory, CQR; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) that address hunches, questions, and reactions, interpretations become an important tool in a careful and rigorous analysis of the data. Furthermore, the write-up should include a balance of participant’s words and researcher interpretations. An important element that has been noted in interpretation of data is the use of quasi-statistics or numerical results used in interpreting and reporting results (Becker, 1970). Identifying particular phenomena as rare, variant, typical, or general (CQR), or using frequencies (discovery-oriented approach), enables the researcher to discuss the amount of evidence that reflects a particular conclusion or the extent to which discrepant instances might exist (Maxwell, 1996).

Consequential validity (Lather, 1994; Patton, 2002) is a standard particular to critical theory, which assesses the extent that research functions as a catalyst for social and political action. This is similar to “catalytic and tactical authenticities” discussed in constructivist paradigms wherein the researcher and participant roles are reciprocal rather than hierarchical. Moreover, the research has the potential to raise consciousness on issues of power and oppression as well as promote “forms of emancipatory community action” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 181). The notion of consequential validity is exemplified in our research on 9/11 and Asian American and South Asian
experiences (Inman et al., 2007; Yeh et al. 2006). These research projects purported to not only increase knowledge of family experiences within the context of the 9/11 tragedy (e.g., access to mental health resources, immigration difficulties), but also advocated for policy changes with regard to culturally relevant mental health services and immigration policies through press conferences in the New York–New Jersey areas.

A related validity based in feminist paradigms that has been suggested by authors is *transgressive validity* (Lather, 1993; Richardson, 1994), a form of validity that goes beyond mechanized approaches to trustworthiness. Within this context, authors argue for authenticity to become completely context sensitive by being open to the fluidity and the multidimensionality of the situation, thus allowing for a truly textual representation of the setting (Denzin, & Lincoln, 2000; Morrow, 2005). In taking the example cited previously, by becoming sensitive to the interplay of interpersonal (cultural, language, familial) and structural (e.g., immigration, mental health services) issues, we were able to critically examine the experience of these families yet recognize that the findings were only a partial representation of the families’ experiences.

**Case Example:** Validity/trustworthiness are critical aspects of our ongoing work with Asian immigrants. For example, all members of the research group, including the community collaborators, are encouraged and expected to be self-reflexive (Rennie, 2004) and use a naive stance when possible (Bernard, 2002). To ensure that our expectations, previous experiences, theories, and biases are not overpowering our interpretations, we have used investigator (Hill et al., 2005) and method triangulation (Denzin, 1978). Investigator triangulation has been in the form of auditor and member checking (Fassinger, 2005; Maxwell, 1996; Morrow, 2005) in which members of the community have been asked to respond to our emerging themes and discern if they are representative of their experiences. Data and method triangulation have been incorporated through the use of multiple strategies for collecting evidence (focus groups, interviews, observations, etc.; Morrow & Smith, 2000; Suzuki et al., 2007 [TCP, special issue, part 3]) and through the use of separate research teams to analyze and interpret data through another lenses.

**DECONSTRUCTING EVIDENCE: STRATEGIES FOR DATA ANALYSIS**

*Deconstructing evidence* refers to an examination and reexamination of the data, refining and modifying the data at multiple levels of complexity (individual, group) in order to locate the main essence or meaning underlying the volumes of data. The objective of qualitative analysis is to determine patterns, themes, relationships, and assumptions that inform the research about the participant’s view of the world in general and about the topic in particular (McCracken, 1988). A major method of data analysis in qualitative research is *coding*.
The goal of coding in qualitative analysis is not to produce a number or a count of things but to deconstruct or fracture (Strauss, 1987, p. 29) the data and develop broad patterns, themes, or categories that are grounded in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). One noted exception is CQR, which uses a quasi-statistical means of coding to identify the extent to which discrepancies might exist across categories (Hill et al., 2005; Maxwell, 1996). However, in all methods of qualitative analysis, coding or categorization typically continues until all of the data are subsumed into the existing categories (i.e., the data reach saturation).

In most qualitative research methodologies, the initial step is to read the interview transcripts, observation notes, documents, and oral histories that are to be analyzed (Dey, 1993). During this initial reading, the researcher typically writes notes, hunches, or reflections as one sifts through the materials, develops tentative ideas, sort ideas into themes/categories, and identifies potential relations between themes and categories. Thus, the intent is to provide “layers of analysis” that help interpret the broader meaning of the data (Creswell, 1998, p. 36). Although the primary strategy of data analysis involves coding, the manner in which data is coded or material is sorted varies by different methods.

One area of focus in qualitative data analysis may involve understanding the philosophical perspectives behind the approach, in particular, understanding how people experience a phenomenon. This involves understanding how researchers understand the phenomenon. As mentioned, phenomenological approaches use epochs or bracketing (Creswell, 1998) while CQR uses the phrase researcher biases (Hill et al., 2005). This process involves researchers identifying or bracketing their own preconceived notions, assumptions, biases, beliefs, values, and expectations about the phenomena prior to collecting the data.

Second, the timing of data analyses varies based on the approach. For example, as soon as the first interview is completed, a researcher may begin data analysis and continue the analysis with changes being made to the questionnaire or findings as one continues with the process of data gathering. This process has been termed theoretical sensitivity and is typical of methods such as GT or ethnography (Glaser, 1978). In other methodologies such as CQR (Hill et al., 2005), research questions are formulated in advance, interviews or observations are tape recorded, and analysis is initiated only after all interviews have been collected. There are merits and limitations to both approaches. In the former, theoretical sensitivity allows for a flexibility of incorporating aspects that one may have missed or for filling in gaps in the research study (Glaser, 1978), allowing for a richer and in-depth analysis of a construct or phenomena. On the other hand, in the event that comparability of interviews and observations are salient, starting
the analyses post data collection becomes more relevant (Maxwell, 1996). This later process also prevents the researcher from being biased by earlier interviews or having to go back and conduct additional interviews to cover the gaps in the literature.

A third step in data analysis involves reducing data by identifying patterns, and themes, describing instances, and classifying data into categories that allow for a broader interpretation of the data. Categories signify units of information composed of situations, happenings, events, and instances (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) that place participants’ experiences in the context being examined. To prepare for this, the researcher examines the literature, situates the topic in his or her own experiences (biases), and peruses what took place in the interview itself. In going through this process, the researcher looks for multiple perspectives and forms of evidence both within each transcript and across cases that support each other. This method of classifying data involves scanning the data for cues, repeated patterns, or instances, and organizing and reorganizing the data until broader themes/categories evolve (Mahrer, 1988). The method of evaluating or coding successive transcripts to a provisional coding criteria highlights data as evolving rather than static and is one of the major premises underlying all qualitative methods.

Typically, several of the methodologies begin with a provisional categorizing system (e.g., discovery-oriented approach, GT) or domains or start lists (e.g., CQR). This categorization system becomes the instrument/paradigm through which the phenomena are studied. Within the context of these categories, data are further reduced by developing subcategories or clusters (GT), meaningful units (phenomenology), and repeated instances/themes (discovery-oriented approach, case studies), which are then illustrated by examples, textual descriptors (phenomenology), core ideas (CQR), and dimensions (GT) that show the essence of the categories. Inherent in these are stories or instances that highlight the different experiences of participants.

In developing the category/classification system, different approaches have been taken. For instance, in a phenomenological approach (Creswell, 1998), the long interview (McCracken, 1988), or in grounded theory (Heppner et al., 1999), one might start by treating an utterance, a statement, or a line as a unit of analysis or entry way into the data. Statements are listed out (e.g., horizontalization or treating all data as equally important) to develop a list of nonrepetitive and nonoverlapping statements. These statements are then grouped into meaningful units or themes that are then transformed into clusters (e.g., categories or psychological concepts). Finally, these clusters/categories are connected to instances that illustrate participants’ experiences and exemplify the cluster. These may include verbatim examples from the transcript.
Alternatively, instead of using specific utterances, researchers using GT, CQR, or discovery-oriented approaches (Mahrer, 1988) develop an initial start list of provisional clusters/categories (open coding stage of GT, discovery-oriented approaches) or domains (CQR) through segmenting interview data (paragraphs or pages) into meaningful units. These provisional clusters/domains reflect broad topical areas of the phenomena being studied. Typically developed from interview questions, literature, or a subset of transcripts, this start list of clusters/domains is then applied to the rest of the data (Hill et al., 2005). Clusters/domains may be revised and reorganized when succeeding transcript add new themes to the list.

Within each domain, the researcher may identify categories and subcategories (properties of the larger domains as in CQR) or examine the relation among existing clusters and develop central or key categories that encompass several subcategories as in GT. Throughout this process, a technique of constant comparison is used within and between cases. Additionally, the researcher then looks for data to dimensionalize or exemplify the different possibilities that embody the subcategories. Methods vary in the order in which exemplifiers might be delineated. For example, in grounded theory and phenomenology, subcategories or meaningful units are developed prior to dimensionalizing or providing the textual description of the data.

Conversely, in CQR, categories get developed after core ideas (textual descriptions) or abstractions of the data are developed. In CQR, the researcher uses the core ideas to generate common themes/categories across participants. These categories represent the core ideas within each domain. The main feature of dimensionalizing or summarizing statements is remaining close to the data so as to provide the “essence” of the stories that illuminate the domain/category. This may often involve verbatim quotes from the transcripts, thus reducing researcher-biased interpretations of the data.

A final step in coding that all of the previously mentioned methodologies tend to use is across-case comparative analysis. Approaches often start with a single subject analysis wherein the researcher obtains a detailed description of themes within a case. This is then followed by comparing the single case to other cases/transcripts. This form of analysis permits one to see similar instances as well as diverging or disconfirming examples of cases, allowing for a more complex, multidimensional perspective of the phenomena. GT uses the term, constant comparison, CQR call it cross-analysis, phenomenologist refer to it as intersubject analyses, while case study use the phrase cross-case analysis to refer to this process. The intent here is to conduct a thematic analysis across cases.

In coding data, qualitative research varies with regard to use of research teams and independent raters or judges (Heppner et al., 1999). In particular, three qualitative approaches—discovery-oriented approaches, GT, and
CQR—have encouraged auditing procedures in the coding process. In case of discovery-oriented approaches, independent raters/judges go through each excerpt, identify patterns and themes, organize data into categories, and refine categories based on new themes. Each step in organizing the data involves a consensus process between the raters (Mahrer, 1988). In grounded theory, auditing can be done through two processes: peers debriefing and inquiry auditing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In peer debriefing, coding is examined to assess if the researcher has stayed close to the data. Inquiry auditing involves ensuring that researchers have followed appropriate procedures (Fassinger, 2005). Inquiry auditing may be conducted by peers involved with the research (e.g., research team members), as well as someone outside the immediate research team both during and at the completion of coding. Similar to GT, in CQR, research team members independently go through each transcript and come together to form a consensus of the domains, core ideas, and categories. Additionally, CQR uses an external auditor who is typically unfamiliar with the research to provide an additional perspective that may not have evolved from a research team group think (Hill et al., 2005).

Data display constitutes an additional and final analytic strategy. These can include quotations (CQR, GT, phenomenology), matrices (case study), comparison tables (discovery-oriented approaches, case study), diagrams (GT), concept maps (ethnography), or frequencies (CQR, discovery-oriented approaches). These display strategies make ideas and analysis visible and facilitate awareness of relationships. In data analysis, they serve two major functions: data reduction and presentation of analysis in a form that allows it to be seen as a whole. The research question (e.g., a question about whether events in a specific context are connected [contextualizing strategies] vs. a question about similarities and differences across settings [frequencies, comparisons]) will determine the way data are displayed (Maxwell, 1996). In the latter case, categories may be interpreted by the use of quasi-statistical terminology to denote the frequency with which each category emerges (see Hill et al., 2005).

Case Example: In considering our research design for one of our studies on Asian immigrant students (Yeh, Kim, Pituc, & Atkins, 2006), we conducted focus groups with students, teachers, school staff, and parents as participants. As part of this research, we incorporated multiple perspectives from research team members, community collaborators, and mentors in developmental, counseling, and clinical psychology, social work, education, ethnic studies, psychiatry, and anthropology. In addition to our description of self-reflexivity and the data-gathering process, our analysis entailed a combination of GT, phenomenology, and CQR in terms of the initial reading (Creswell, 1998), coding, developing patterns, themes, and domains, and data display (Fassinger, 2005; Hill et al., 1997). Moreover, all researchers maintained
notes and memos during the data-coding process (Fassinger, 2005; Hill et al., 2005) to record ideas about themes, patterns, and relationships that occurred during data reduction process (Heppner et al., 1999). We also tried to focus on the essence of our data and underlying meanings as part of this process by continually discussing our data with each other and with the community. We do not consider these ideas to be fixed in time but part of an ongoing process of exploration and theory development.

Specifically, we selected GT to reflect our philosophical leanings and because previous research studies using focus groups have also used GT (Farooqi, Nagra, Edgar, & Khunti, 2000; Swagler & Ellis, 2003). To provide multiple points of view and a more rigorous analytic strategy, we used two raters and two auditors in the data coding and analyses, as in CQR (Hill et al., 1997), in addition to the grounded theory method (Swagler & Ellis, 2003). Four female graduate students in counseling and clinical psychology were selected to be raters and auditors. The raters included a Filipina American and a Korean American. The auditors included a Korean American and a Chinese international student. None of the raters or auditors had served as focus group moderators (Swagler & Ellis, 2003).

The raters read through all of the transcripts for an overview while keeping extensive researcher notes during the process. They then read the transcripts again and created labels for categories and potential themes, highlighted relevant quotes, and looked for common as well as different ideas across all of the groups (Fassinger, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Swagler & Ellis, 2003). The raters were not bound to the structure of the interview questions and tried to stay open to multiple interpretations of the data. In creating labels for categories and themes, the raters read through the transcripts a few times and took notes relating to their reactions and things that stood out. This also included highlighting quotes that seem to capture an emerging theme. Typically, in the second review of the transcripts, the rater would read various responses and try to ascertain whether there was some larger concept/category or experience emerging from the data and whether this spoke to a larger theme that encompasses several concepts/categories. As an example, a student participant in a focus group said the following:

After I came here, I lived with my father at the beginning. Then, as my father went back to China for some time, and I stayed on my own alone. Later my aunt’s whole family moved here too, so I lived in a family of five people. My uncle moved in later, which made this a family of six. There have been a lot of changes.

From this quote, the categorical label “student lives with different family members” was initially created. This label was later revised to “change in living arrangement.”
The themes and categories were developed using all of the transcripts together to capture the points of convergence as well as divergence across the groups. After all of the transcripts were labeled, the raters created larger themes based on the categories. For example, using the student quote cited earlier, while the rater was conducting the coding process, the rater noted the larger theme of a change in family structure (inferring that the family structure in the homeland was children living with one or both parents) that then seemed to emerge from this quote. Moreover, specific categories were also collapsed into themes. An example of this would be “parent–child relationship close” and “parent–child relationship more distant” into “changes in parent–child relationship.”

To ensure that both raters’ viewpoints were incorporated into the list of themes, the raters discussed the themes until consensus was reached as in CQR (Hill et al., 1997, 2005) and to provide a more rigorous check of the data analysis process. CQR has also been used extensively with complex, in-depth data from Asian immigrant populations (Kim et al., 2003; Yeh et al., 2004, 2006).

The two auditors followed the same procedures and coding as the raters. However, they did not meet to reach a consensus. Instead, they used their independently derived themes as a basis to provide extensive and separate feedback to the raters as is typical in CQR. The auditors separately read through the raters’ original categories and domains and provided detailed oral and written feedback about ways to expand, extend, reshape, and recode the data. The raters then met and incorporated the auditors’ feedback into a final version.

In general, there were two general ways that the auditors helped. First, they helped us identify categories we had overlooked, usually because these were themes that were more prominent in one group (i.e., students) but nevertheless important to include in describing the experiences relayed in the focus groups. Second, they helped us in providing feedback on the themes and categories we created. For example, in our theme “help seeking attitudes and behaviors” (later changed to “coping behaviors”), we received some helpful feedback that we had overlooked (e.g., the idea of avoidance and avoidance behaviors as a way of coping). Specifically, the auditor provided written feedback which stated, “I also found ‘reliance on electronics’ and ‘avoidance’ to be common types of help-seeking behaviors.” One auditor suggested that we include church as a help seeking/coping behavior, while the other auditor had included this in her independently generated domains/categories. We reconsidered this, looked back at the transcripts, and decided to include it as one of the coping behaviors. The auditor had stated in her feedback, “I would add an additional category to this domain: utilizing church resources for assistance” (the auditor then cited three representative quotations from the participants that illustrated this suggestion).
The final version of all of the themes, subcategories, and their descriptions was then reviewed by one member of each of the original student, parent, teacher, and staff focus groups as a stability check (Hill et al., 1997; Swagler & Ellis, 2003) and to determine if our emerging themes reflected their experiences. This additional feedback was discussed among the raters and incorporated. Finally, the entire research team (i.e., raters, auditors, group facilitators, translators, transcribers, and investigators) met and discussed all of the domains and categories and related quotes to determine a final consensus version. In this meeting, the themes and categories were presented to the research team, and representative quotes from the raw data were provided as evidence. Research team members then questioned the raters and auditors about the themes (e.g., How were they defined?), and there were also questions to ensure that the themes did not overlap with one another. The raters also raised questions to the research team that they had about their analysis. For example, they inquired about which theme was more accurate: help seeking attitudes and behaviors or coping behaviors. The research team discussed this at length and because the specific categories did not necessarily involve actively seeking help, they agreed that the theme should be changed to coping behaviors.

Our results included nine themes with their categories and the representativeness of each category within each focus group. Based on CQR criteria suggested by Hill et al. (1997), a category was considered general if applicable to all of the participants within each focus group, typical if applicable to half or more of the participants within each focus group, and variant if applicable to two or just less than half of the participants within each focus group. We also included the category, atypical, to represent one participant in the group and not mentioned if the category was nonexistent in the group. To offer an example, one theme was labeled as family structure and dynamics, which describes how the youths’ family structure and dynamics had been greatly affected by immigration. Specifically, our multiple informants reported a change in traditional parent and child roles; oftentimes, the parents are dependent on their children for various tasks. A quote from a teacher from one of the focus groups:

If you ask the kids, “Who’s the leader of the family?” every single one of them will say, “My father.” In fact, though, they [the kids] may be doing the interpreting, and translating, and filling out forms, they may be the de facto leader.

From this and many similar quotes emerged the Change in Parent and Child Roles and Responsibilities category that describes how immigrant youths had in fact become cultural brokers in their family and were shifting responsibilities with their parents because of their English language acquisition and growing understanding of cultural norms.
IMPLICATIONS

Research

At its birth, psychology was pulled by divorcing parents, humanism, and scientific realism, and custody was given to the latter. Now past its youth, it can step out on its own (Uba, 2002, p. 137).

The underrepresentation of qualitative research in counseling psychology is mystifying given the strong emphasis on human interconnectedness in counseling research and practice. The lack of published articles using qualitative research analysis in counseling psychology journals may stem from a dearth of qualified reviewers, complexities in identifying systematic methods in analysis, the length of time (or anticipated length of time) it takes to conduct and write qualitative research, the philosophical leanings in doctoral training programs and on journal editorial boards, and difficulties in collaborating with communities (e.g., it took Yeh more than 2 years to gain access to a New York City school for research).

To address these challenges and barriers, counseling psychologists need to research the qualitative research process and explore emerging methodological trends (as in Hill et al., 2005). Hill et al. demonstrated circularity in their own work by analyzing 27 published articles using CQR and reevaluating research practices, in turn, offering new insights and recommendations for future research. Similarly, Ponterotto (2005a) has explored patterns of practice in qualitative research in doctoral programs and published articles, highlighting possibilities for increasing the role of qualitative research in counseling psychology (Ponterotto, 2005b, 2005c; Ponterotto & Grieger, 2007 [this issue]). Other research could address specific methods or trends in qualitative research analysis (see Rennie, Watson, & Monteiro, 2002) such as microcomputer-assisted qualitative analysis (Todd, 1987), strategies for categorization (Chwalisz, Wiersma, & Stark-Wroblewski, 1996), or incorporating multiple methods (Hanson et al., 2005; Haverkamp et al., 2005).

Training

Although counseling psychology programs are increasingly emphasizing self-awareness as an important aspect of multicultural counselor competence, exploration of self-locations as they relate to qualitative research analysis; interpretation continues to be lacking. Counseling training programs should encourage students to know their location, position, and their multiple identities and how they influence the world. This will help inform the research process, the questions students ask, and the interpretations they make. To foster this, counseling psychology training programs must begin
to structurally and philosophically incorporate ways to facilitate this self-awareness. This may entail developing classes that focus on intercultural awareness, exploration of reference groups, examination of research bias in research studies, and so forth. More specifically, research curricula should include the use of open-ended journals for quiet reflection and to help deepen insight about trainees’ experiences (Burnett & Meacham, 2002; Rak, MacCluskie, Toman, Patterson, & Culotta, 2003).

According to Heppner et al. (1999), working with a sample in qualitative research is similar to the working alliance with a counseling client. Consistent with the scientist–practitioner model, counseling psychology training programs could try to bridge science with practice by helping students understand the dimensions and complexities of working with communities in research and in practice and how this process influences supervision, research, and clinical training. Specifically, content could draw the parallel between conducting phenomenological qualitative research and participating in a counseling interview (Heppner et al., 1999).

Moreover, communities, faculty, students, policymakers, administrators, and practitioners should be encouraged to do qualitative research and should find the means to collaborate in ways that contribute to advancing the field (e.g., results from qualitative research should lead to the development of prevention and intervention programs or the creation of counseling and supervision practices and techniques). To ensure that qualitative research methods are well integrated into the field of counseling psychology (and not a passing trend), students, faculty, researchers, and journal editors need to explore and challenge their assumptions and biases around definitions of “good” or “rigorous” research. At present, it is clear that there is a lack of commitment to training in qualitative research. Ponterotto (2005c) has extensively researched the role of qualitative research training in graduate school programs and has developed a sample curriculum for both master’s and doctoral degree programs (for introductory course suggestions, see also Poulin, 2007 [this issue]). We strongly believe that such a curriculum can be used to incorporate many of the strategies and practices that we have described in this article.

REFERENCES


