

Quality and Rigor in Qualitative Research

Elizabeth Pope, PhD
University of West Georgia
epope@westga.edu



Learning Outcomes

- Make the paradigm shift necessary to understand quality and rigor in qualitative research.
- Know how quantitative approaches to validity and reliability do not apply to qualitative research.
- Understand the different approaches to establishing quality in qualitative research.
- Recognize what methods are needed to have a rigorous qualitative study.



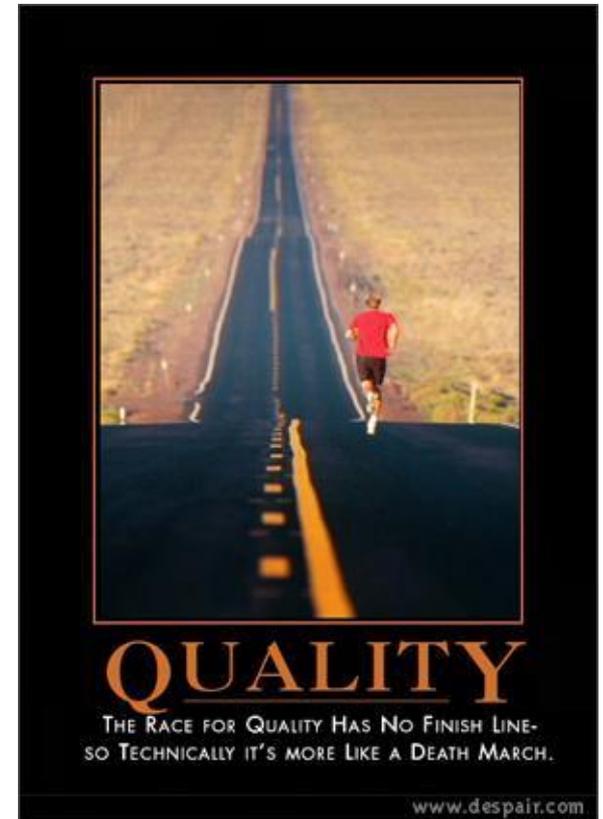
Assessing Quality in Qualitative Research

- Various scholars = various opinions on appropriate terminology. For example:
 - Lincoln & Guba (2011) – depends on paradigm
 - Positivism & Postpositivism – rigor (external validity, reliability, & objectivity)
 - Critical Theories – historical situatedness, erosion of ignorance and misapprehensions, action stimulus
 - Constructivism – trustworthiness and authenticity
 - Creswell & Creswell (2018) – validity & reliability
 - Tracy (2010) – 8 “Big-Tent” Criteria



“Validity”

- *Validity is a contentious term*
- *Q: “Are these findings sufficiently authentic that I may trust myself in acting on their implications?” (p. 120)*



[Photo Source](#)



2 Simultaneous Arguments

Validity through research methods

- Methodological criteria to establish validity like good interviews, prolonged time in the field, etc.
- Positivist & post-positivist

Validity through interpretation

- Are we interpretively rigorous?
- Can our co-created constructions be trusted to provide some purchase on some important human phenomenon?
- Do our findings point to action that can be taken on the part of research participants to benefit themselves?
- Constructivist



Shifting Our Thinking from Validity to Trustworthiness

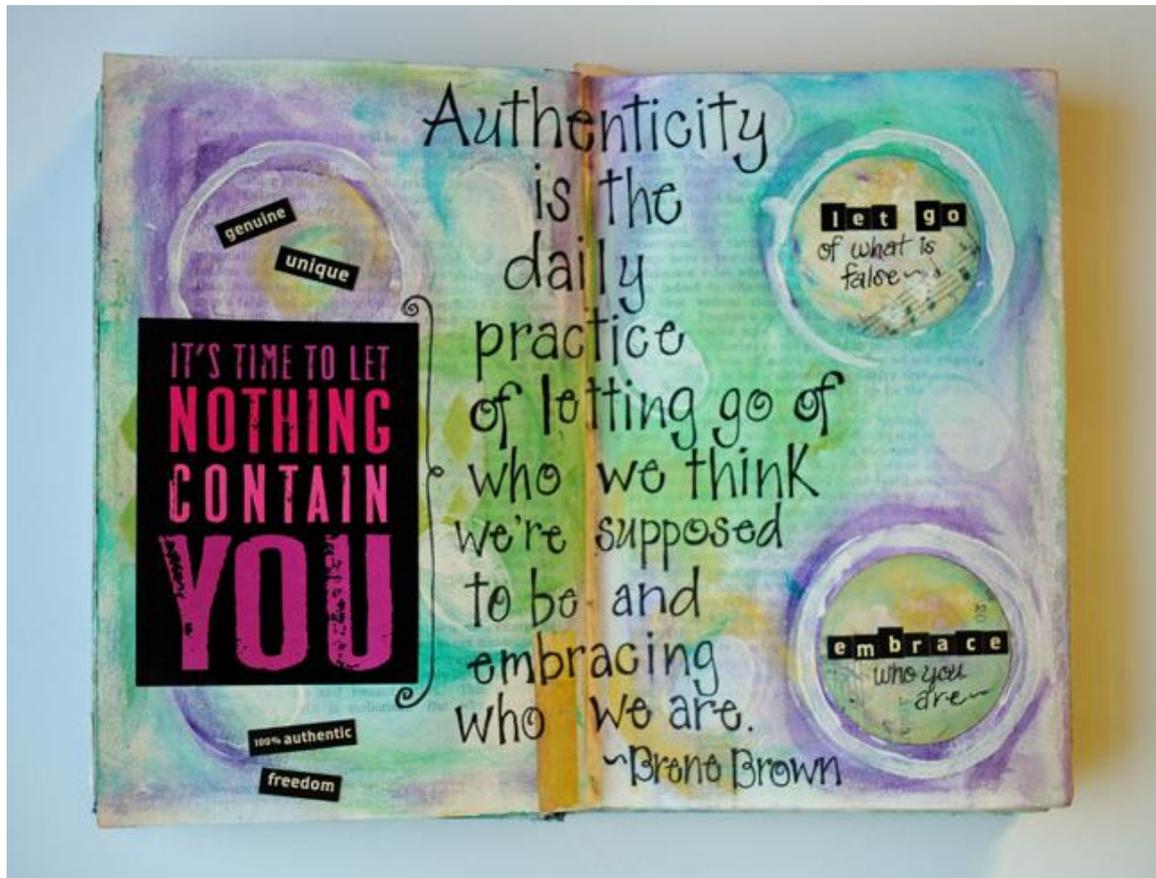
- More rigor = more trustworthy findings
- Concept developed by Lincoln & Guba in 1985
- “Trustworthiness provides qualitative researchers with a set of tools by which they can illustrate the worth of their project outside the confines of the often ill-fitting quantitative parameters” (Given & Saumure, 2008, p. 895)



Establishing Trustworthiness: A Translation of Terms

Criterion	Conventional Term	Naturalistic Term	Naturalistic Techniques
Truth value	Internal validity	Credibility	Prolonged engagement Persistent observation Triangulation Referential adequacy Peer debriefing Member checks Reflexive journal
Applicability	External validity	Transferability	Thick description Purposive sampling Reflexive journal
Consistency	Reliability	Dependability	Dependability audit Reflexive journal
Neutrality	Objectivity	Confirmability	Confirmability audit Reflexive journal

Authenticity



[Photo Source](#)

- Fairness
- Ontological authenticity
- Educative authenticity
- Catalytic authenticity
- Tactical authenticity



Ethical Relationships

- Positionality
- Arbiters of quality
- Voice
- Critical subjectivity
- Reciprocity
- Sacredness
- Sharing of privileges



[Photo Source](#)



8 “Big Tent” Criteria



[Photo Source](#)

- Worthy topic
- Rich rigor
- Sincerity
- Credibility
- Resonance
- Significant contribution
- Ethics
- Meaningful coherence



Strategies to Establish Quality

- Triangulation
- Member checking
- Thick description
- Reflexivity and clarification of bias
- Prolonged time in the field
- Peer debriefing



Resources

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Erlanson, D. A., Harris, E. L., Skipper, B. L., & Allen, S. D. (1993). *Doing naturalistic inquiry: A guide to methods*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.

Given, L. M., & Saumure, K. (2008). Trustworthiness. In L. M. Given (Ed.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods* (pp. 895-896). doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412963909.n470>

James, N. (2008). Authenticity. In L. M. Given (Ed.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods* (p. 45). doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412963909.n26>

Lincoln, Y. S., & Lynham, S. A., & Guba, E. G. (2011). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences, revisited. In Y. S. Lincoln & E. G. Guba (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 87-128).

Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight "big-tent" criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry* 16(10), 837-851. doi: [10.1177/1077800410383121](https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800410383121)

