

‘The invisible paradigm war’: civil unrest within qualitative inquiry and the problems of sample saturation

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Aims

- ▶ Open debate about the impact of mixing qualitative methods
- ▶ Question the taken-for-granted assumption that mixing qualitative approaches is unproblematic
- ▶ Review the utility of a universal quality criteria of qualitative inquiry
- ▶ Use a specific example of sample saturation

Mixing qualitative methods

- ▶ Two ways of mixing qualitative research:
 1. Conducting two separate qualitative projects and later synthesising the evidence
 2. Collecting two different types of qualitative data within one project and combining them

Barbour 1998

- ▶ “To design multi-method studies and to collect and analyze data without due critical attention to the convergent but distinct methodologies and traditions that we invoke is to risk creating a qualitative quagmire” (356).

Quality criteria

- ▶ Controversy over universality of qualitative quality criteria
- ▶ Sensible solution to guiding overarching principles of quality (see Tracy, 2010) and simultaneously recognise the distinct aspects of individual approaches and differing epistemologies

Saturation

- ▶ **Terms:** data saturation, thematic saturation, theoretical saturation, saturation, sample saturation - generally used indiscriminately
- ▶ Origin - grounded theory - distinct meaning for this method
- ▶ Has become the gold standard for sampling in qualitative work

The problem

- ▶ Is it an ideal that cannot be reached? Few researchers are transparent about saturation
- ▶ Inappropriate to measure the quality of a piece of work by quality standards that have not been designed for that approach
- ▶ Sample adequacy not sample size (see Bowen, 2008)

Saturation and mixing methods

- ▶ If saturation is inappropriate for one qualitative method and not for the other - there are implications for applying it generically to both
- ▶ Can you mix two qualitative approaches that have different quality criteria?