

Writeup of Gaskell and Bauer (2000)

Gaskell, G., & Bauer, M. W. (2000). Towards public accountability: Beyond sampling, reliability, and validity. In M. W. Bauer & G. Gaskell (Eds.), *Qualitative researching with text, image and sound* (pp. 336-350). London, UK: Sage.

Summary

Gaskell and Bauer (2000) proposed criteria for measuring what they termed the “public accountability” of qualitative research, moving beyond the issues of sampling, reliability, and validity as used in quantitative research. After a brief discussion of the types of qualitative methods and how to choose amongst them, they explored the traditional considerations and definitions of reliability, validity, and representativeness in quantitative research. They noted systematic sampling is difficult in most qualitative research yet “the problem of establishing evidence to support claims for typicality of the results of qualitative research remains” (p. 342). They presented three alternative perspectives: (a) a “direct mapping” of the three concepts to qualitative research (p. 342); (b) entirely rejecting them as positivistic and irrelevant; or (c) the creation of new criteria to measure the quality of qualitative research. Gaskell and Bauer took a systematic approach to option (c), considering “public accountability”—accountability of science to the public domain—to be the base such measures should be built upon (p. 344). They categorized these measures by whether accountability came from confidence that the results “represent ‘reality’” (p. 344) or from relevance, the “utility and importance” of the research as it relates to existing theories and new findings (p. 345); some fell into both categories. They proposed six quality criteria: (a) triangulation (of methods and perspectives) and reflexivity (reflecting on findings and their relation to theory); (b) transparency and procedural clarity; (c) corpus construction (the data collection process, including issues of saturation); (d) thick description (the inclusion of “extensive ... verbatim reporting of sources,” p. 347); (e) surprise value (revealing and relevant findings compared to what was expected or theorized); and (f) communicative validation (the confirming of findings with participants where not resulting in censorship or ethical issues). Criteria (a) through (d) were measures of confidence and (c) through (f) were measures of relevance.

Analysis

Gaskell and Bauer systematically selected their criteria based on multiple dimensions, and as such they certainly appear valid on their face. Some of their criteria mirror those of other

researchers; for example Kvale (1996) also considered triangulation and communicative validity important elements, and the confirmability and credibility of research—inherent in Gaskell and Bauer’s measures of confidence—were also mentioned by Golafshani (2003). However, there are other often-suggested measures that they did not consider directly, such as dependability and trustworthiness (mentioned by Golafshani, 2003). It seems quite clear that qualitative researchers do not completely agree on how quality should be measured, despite a number of scholars attempting to summarize criteria based on literature, theory, and epistemology. I think a qualitative researcher-in-training—such as myself—would do good to review a number of these—as I have done—and draw on them in sum, considering most of the criteria suggested to “replace” validity when designing, conducting, and evaluating qualitative research projects. Gaskell and Bauer’s chapter presents one of the more systematic and organized considerations of alternatives to validity, arguing from a theoretical and epistemological viewpoint without delving too deeply into philosophical issues (as Kvale comparatively did). As such I would highly recommend it to other students and beginning qualitative researchers.

Keywords: quality, public accountability, methods, reliability, validity, representativeness, alternatives to validity, confidence, relevance, triangulation, reflexivity, transparency, clarity of procedures, corpus construction, thick description, surprise value, communicative validation

Writeup of Golafshani (2003)

Golafshani, N. (2003). Understanding reliability and validity in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, 8(4), 597-607.

Summary

Golafshani (2003) provided an overview, based on the literature, of reliability and validity and their use in qualitative research, comparing it to quantitative research and also discussing how they could be tested for in research projects. She first defined quantitative research and noted it was concerned with “observable, measurable ... objective” facts and relationships (p. 598). In such research, reliability means the repeatability, stability, and similarity of measurements consistently over time, while validity is whether such a measurement “truly measures that which it was intended to measure” (Joppe, 2000, p. 1, as cited in Golafshani, 2003, p. 599), a form of accuracy. Defining qualitative research as “a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings” (p. 600), Golafshani stated there was much disagreement amongst researchers following this approach over the relevance of reliability to qualitative research. Terms such as “credibility, ... confirmability, ... dependability ... transferability,” and “trustworthiness” are considered by many to be more relevant (p. 601), dependability and trustworthiness being seen the most closely linked to reliability by Lincoln and Guba (1985, as cited in Golafshani, 2003) and Seale (1999, as cited in Golafshani, 2003), respectively. Validity, on the other hand, is more accepted by qualitative researchers, but only as “a contingent construct, inescapably grounded in the processes and intentions of particular research methodologies and projects” (Winter, 2000, p. 1, as cited in Golafshani, 2003, p. 602). This includes such terms and concepts as “quality, rigor and trustworthiness” (p. 602). There is a little less agreement on how to test validity and reliability in qualitative research, with a few scholars arguing the generalizability of findings is a useful test; however, according to Golafshani most, especially those following a constructivist epistemology, have argued for triangulation as a “strategy ... for improving the validity and reliability” of qualitative research projects (p. 603). She concluded that “reliability, validity and triangulation ... have to be redefined” to be used in qualitative research (p. 604).

Analysis

Golafshani’s article is well-researched and provides a good overview of the literature on validity and reliability in qualitative research. She makes an excellent attempt at avoiding any

built-in bias towards the concepts being relevant (or not) in such research, only introducing a slight constructivist bias near the end when discussing triangulation. The article still only provides an overview, however, and does not discuss concepts such as credibility, trustworthiness, quality, and rigor in any substantial depth. A researcher looking to establish a definition of validity for their research study would probably want to examine other literature—including that cited by Golafshani—and consider theoretical and epistemological perspectives (as done by Kvale, 1996; and Gaskell & Bauer, 2000) in order to make their own decision. Despite some awkward grammar throughout, I would recommend Golafshani's article as a useful overview of validity and reliability in qualitative research, albeit best paired with other research that further discusses some of the alternatives for measuring validity.

Keywords: reliability, validity, credibility, confirmability, dependability, transferability, trustworthiness, quality, rigor, measuring validity, generalizability, constructivism, triangulation

Writeup of Jordan and Dalal (2006)

Jordan, B., & Dalal, B. (2006). Persuasive encounters: Ethnography in the corporation. *Field Methods*, 18(4), 359-381. doi:10.1177/1525822X06292976

Summary

Jordan and Dalal’s (2006) article discussed some of the comments that often come up, particularly in corporate environments, questioning the validity, reliability, and overall effectiveness and quality of ethnographic research. These objections and their suggested solutions and answers are summarized in the table below.

Objection	Suggested solutions
It “takes too long” (p. 360)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stress that “extended periods of fieldwork generate cumulative results that are impossible to achieve with time compression” (p. 362)
It “costs too much” (p. 362)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note that “the ethnographic component” will likely be “a very small slice” of the budget, but could have large implications for other parts (p. 363)
Just use market research and focus groups instead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These should be seen as “complementary” rather than competing (p. 364) • During a project they should be used at different stages and in “different concentrations” at each stage • Stress that attitudes and what people <i>say</i> they will do—as obtained from focus groups and market research—can not always be “equate[d] ... with actions” and with what people <i>actually</i> do and think (p. 365)
Manager could observe just as easily as hiring an ethnographer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make an “educational effort” that stresses the “rigorous methodology” used (p. 368) • Note that ethnographers have gone through substantial training to aid them “to look for known patterns” while being “alert [for] interesting observations that might herald a new pattern” (p. 367)
Cannot generalize results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look to see if findings apply to other groups within a company, or echo earlier findings from other companies and studies (pp. 369-372)
Results cannot be quantified, aren’t scientific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect any and all data that could be construed as a measure of return-on-investment (ROI) (pp. 372-373) • Stress that ethnography is rigorous science that has a long history of usage by many well-known scientists and in many fields when an experimental approach is artificial (pp. 373-374)
“What kinds of results” will be provided (p. 375)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethnographers and managers have to come to agreement and “spell out what results we are looking for,” when they will be made available, and in what form they will come (p. 375) • Work with “all levels of stakeholders throughout the project” and discuss each finding with “influential people” in the corporation (p. 377)

Above all, Jordan and Dalal stressed that “collaboration, compromise, coexperiencing,” and education were necessary elements of ethnographic projects in corporations (p. 379).

Analysis

While clearly focused on corporate environments and the questions and objections that are often raised in such situations, many if not most of Jordan and Dalal’s arguments for the validity, reliability, and overall effectiveness and quality of ethnographic work can be applied to ethnographic work in general. Their bias towards ethnography of work practices in companies and organizations is to be expected, seeing as that is the kind of research they do; while it influences their article and particularly the examples they give, it does not damage their overall arguments and points. Their suggested solutions and reactions to the questions managers and others may ask about ethnographic work include both reasons why ethnographic work is valid and effective and suggestions on how to improve this validity and effectiveness; the inclusion of both strengthens their article greatly, in my view. I would certainly recommend it to anyone pursuing ethnographic research who needs advice and suggestions on how to argue for and improve the validity, effectiveness, and quality of their study.

Keywords: validity, reliability, effectiveness, quality, ethnography, corporate ethnography, objections, time, cost, market research, focus groups, making the case, generalizability, quantification, return on investment (ROI), research process

Writeup of Kvale (1996)

Kvale, S. (1996). The social construction of validity. In *InterViews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing* (pp. 229-252). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Summary

In this chapter, Kvale (1996) went “beyond the extremes” of both pure subjectivity and pure objectivity and instead took a postmodern, constructionist approach to validity in qualitative interview research (p. 229). He started by noting the debate and arguments between quantitative and qualitative researchers—and indeed within these groups—as to the meanings and importance of generalizability, reliability, and validity. Next, he divided generalizability into three types: *naturalistic*, “rest[ing] on personal experience” (p. 232); *statistical*, based on one’s confidence of how representative a sample is of a population; and *analytical*, “a reasoned judgment about ... [how well] findings from one study can be used as a guide ... in another situation” (p. 233). Kvale’s discussion of reliability was short, focusing on “the consistency of the research findings” (p. 235). The remainder of his article discussed validity in-depth, a concept he felt was an important issue at all stages of an interview project. He derived three categories of validity from “three classical criteria of truth” from philosophy: *correspondence*, *coherence*, and *pragmatic* validity. Since social constructionism and postmodernism require “giving up a correspondence theory of truth,” Kvale argued that validity rests on the “quality of craftsmanship, ... coheren[t] and pragmatic ... communication of knowledge, ... [and] pragmatic proof through action” (p. 240). Craftsmanship validity requires “checking the findings” of research (p. 242), questioning “‘what’ and ‘why’ ... before the question of ‘how’” in order to triangulate or crystallize findings (p. 243), and to “generate theoretical questions about the nature of the phenomena investigated” (p. 244). “Communicative validity” (p. 244) is present when an argument is present in dialogue, questions arising to be answered of how this discourse occurs, why there is a discourse, and who is part of the discourse. Finally, “pragmatic validation rests on observations and interpretations, with a commitment to act on the interpretations” (p. 248); it may involve “knowledge statements ... accompanied by action” or statements that “instigate changes of action” (p. 249).

Analysis

As evidenced by the liberal quotes above, many of Kvale’s concepts and arguments were a little difficult for me to grasp; his philosophical and theoretical focus and style of writing—especially compared to Golafshani (2003) and Gaskell and Bauer (2000)—did not aid

understanding of his arguments. His types of generalizability do appear to make sense, in many ways naturalistic generalizability paralleling face validity and analytical being the most reasoned and true to qualitative research of the three. His discussion of validity and the various types probably should be considered an actual theory of validity, albeit one that Kvale does not provide substantial empirical evidence for. Nevertheless, the quality and craftsmanship of qualitative research, how coherently the knowledge it contains is communicated, whether a discourse grows and is maintained based on the research, and whether it causes pragmatic results and actions to be taken are all very useful measures of valid qualitative research. While I probably wouldn't recommend Kvale's chapter to a qualitative researcher (or researcher-in-training) who needed a quick reference on validity, I do think it would be useful as an additional reading to provide theoretical and philosophical background for some of the concepts suggested as alternatives to the quantitative conception of validity.

Keywords: validity, generalizability, postmodern, social constructionist, naturalistic generalizability, statistical generalizability, analytical generalizability, correspondence validity, coherence validity, pragmatic validity, quality of craftsmanship, craftsmanship validity, communicative validity, action research, theoretical, philosophical