Great Lakes Conference Symposium Submission

Lived Experiences of the Marginalized: Grounded Theory & CQR

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The Grounded Theory (GT) approach involves generating a theory that is grounded in empirical data through an inductive approach (Saven-Baden & Major, 2013). GT can be used not only for examining the relationship between various concepts but also for explaining the diverse processes, generating hypotheses and mapping. In the past few years, several forms of grounded theory have emerged that employ diverse focuses and philosophical roots. “All is data” is a core feature of GT (Saven-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 188). As GT approach provides a unique way of understanding the lived experiences of individuals from diverse backgrounds and for deconstructing previous held notions, it has been used across the intersectionality of race (Wendt & Gone, 2012), social class (Thompson et al., 2012) and gender (Dispenza et al., 2012).

Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) involves asking specific open-ended questions about a topic from the participants that are then coded into themes in a consensual manner by a group of researchers. The consensus process forms the core of this research as it is based on the notion that multiple perspectives help bring us closer to the actual truth (Hill, 1997). The consensus process is founded on the principles of mutual respect, shared power and equal involvement. CQR analysis can be used for exploring the inner experiences of marginalized individuals. Studies utilizing CQR analysis include Kordesh et al.’s (2013) study that examined the racial affect of White university students and Sander et al.’s (2011) study that examined the issue of social justice among juvenile offenders.

This symposium will focus on the theoretical underpinnings of grounded theory and CQR along-with a discussion of the methodology used for data analysis. The presentation will conclude with a discussion of qualitative studies that have used these two methods with marginalized groups and future implications for research.
What better way of building bridges between diverse people and communities, than through developing an understanding of how their diverse social worlds and communities are constructed? What better way of accomplishing this, than by learning about their untold stories? Nevertheless, access to such invaluable insights is rarely the result of paradigmic knowing, which is associated with positivist physical sciences, operates on abstract “if ... then” statements about the world, and seeks to link observable phenomena to specific causal factors and processes (McLeod, 2011). Rather than through paradigmic cause-and-effect knowledge, unsilencing the voices overlooked by empirical processes calls for a more efficient alternative to understanding diversity: narrative knowing, used in qualitative research. Associated with everyday accounts of human action - usually in the form of stories - (McLeod, 2011) narrative knowing could be used to pick up invaluable information that fall outside pre-established scientific hypotheses.

This presentation will center around two methods of narrative knowledge used in qualitative research: Narrative Analysis and Phenomenology. Originating from 1960’s, Narrative Analysis has emerged as a response to the lack of human stories in the traditional social sciences, and resulted into what has become known as a “narrative turn” in the social science research (Chase, 2005). These methods facilitated insight into various life stories that portrayed personal struggles caused by poverty, inequality, sexism, and many other cultural and social experiences (Chase, 2005). The key point is that people make sense of their realities through storytelling. In conjunction with the narration of participants, phenomenology helps the researcher to investigate the effects and perceptions of a shared experience or condition through the subjective eyes of participants. Phenomenology is thus preoccupied with the human perspective of the phenomena rather than the phenomena itself. As a qualitative method of inquiry, it can be applied to a host of experiences.
Two collaborative qualitative methods that facilitate the voice of marginalized populations are Action research and Arts based approaches. Action research is a qualitative method that engages in problem solving through a cyclical process of thinking, acting, data gathering and reflection (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Rather than having a clear delineation between researchers and participants, in the action research process everyone works collaboratively, driven by a unifying purpose of advocating for change. Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Community Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR) are the most common methods used by counseling psychologists till date in empowering and advocating for the concerns of marginalized populations such as: the disabled (Walker, 1993), LGBTQ Individuals (Morrow, 2003), individuals living with HIV/AIDS (O’Neill et al., 1999), and empowering minority youth in youth based participatory action research or YPAR school counseling interventions (Smith et al., 2010).

Arts-Based Research is a collaborative qualitative method that uses the arts as a primary method to explore the human experience. Art forms such as photography, poetry, drama, dance, music, poetry and visual art are employed to formulate the research question, generate and analyze data and present the results (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The three main types of arts-based research are Arts – based inquiry, Arts – informED inquiry and Arts-inf ormING inquiry. Data generation of these methods can be through storytelling groups, reflective journals, photo-voice, ethnotheater, weaving and any culturally specific art form that applies to the individuals (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Smith et al. (2012) used Photo-Voice as a way to counsel youth and address social justice issues in poverty and Castleden et al. (2010) used Photo-Voice and Community Based Participatory Action Research to empower the voices of Indigenous communities in Canada. Clearly, collaborative qualitative methods represent a great promise in providing a voice for the marginalized populations in counseling psychology.