# Dissecting Research Articles – Qualitative – Public Service Leadership

Having completed the courseroom activity, *Dissecting a Qualitative Article*, you will turn your attention to qualitative research. In this activity, you will read Sample Article 2 and will answer a series of questions. Please answer the questions posed in each section. If you do not know the answer, circle the *Neutral* answer.

**Note:** You may refer to the [Dissecting Research Articles](http://campustools.capella.edu/BBCourse_Production/PhD_Colloquia_CR3/Track_1/phd_t1_u05s1_h01_dissect.html) handout as you complete this activity.

### Section 1: Abstract, Introduction, Hypothesis, Research Question, and the Literature Review

As you will recall from Dissecting a Qualitative Article, the abstract and the Introduction to the paper contain a number of important points. They are the same for a qualitative article as they are for quantitative articles. Please answer the following questions.

**Directions***:* After reading Article 2, please answer the following questions.

###### Corcoran, J., Mewse, A., & Babiker, G. (2007). The role of women's self-injury support-groups: A grounded theory. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology, 17*(1), 35–52.

1. “An abstract is a brief, comprehensive summary of the contents of the article; it allows the readers to survey the contents of an article quickly and, like a title, it enables the persons interested in the document to retrieve it from abstracting and indexing databases” (APA, 2010, p. 25).

The abstract clearly and accurately summarizes the content of the study.

**Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree**

1. The introduction describes the research topic and depicts the problem statement. The introduction should inform the reader regarding the potential of the research to provide important and relevant answers.

The introduction explains why this problem is important and why this topic is worth researching.

**Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree**

1. Creswell (2007) asserts that in qualitative studies, the “need for the study” is a more appropriate terminology than the problem statement. “The intent of a research problem in qualitative research is to provide a rationale or need for studying a particular issue or problem.” (p. 102). Still, both methodologies must demonstrate a need for the study or a problem statement.

The researcher clearly describes the problem or the need for studying the topic under inquiry.

**Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree**

1. Were the key terms defined? The reader needs to understand exactly what the writer is saying.

The research question is clearly stated and the key terms are defined.

**Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree**

1. The literature review outlines the theory and past findings that are relevant to the research goals. The literature review should document the importance of the research problem.

The literature review supports the necessity to study the specific research question.

**Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree**

1. The introduction, statement of the problem, and the literature review are appropriate and consistent with the research question.

**Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree**

### Please write one paragraph reflecting your evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of Section 1.

### Section 2: Methodology – Research Design, Methods and Procedures, and Sampling

Creswell (2003, p.18) describes qualitative research as follows:

“…a qualitative approach is one in which the inquirer often makes knowledge claims based primarily on constructivist perspectives (i.e., the multiple meanings of individual experiences, meanings socially and historically constructed, with an intent of developing a theory or a pattern)…The researcher collects open-ended, emerging data with the primary intent of developing themes from the data.”

Taylor and Bogdan (1998, p. 7) note that “*qualitative methodology* refers in the broadest sense to research that produces descriptive data—people's own written or spoken words and observable behavior.”

The goal of qualitative research is to gain an understanding of the experiences of the individuals who participate in the research study. Qualitative research is aimed at discovery, understanding, meaning, and developing knowledge from the perspective of first person accounts of the experience under inquiry. Examples of qualitative research methodologies are:

* **Phenomenology**—concentrates on the study of phenomena as experienced by the individual, with the emphasis on exactly how a phenomenon reveals itself to the experiencing person in all its specificity and concreteness. The participant experiencing a phenomenon is required to attend to it exactly as it appears in consciousness, without prejudgment, bias, or any predetermined set or orientation.
* **Grounded theory**—is a descriptive research approach that attempts to develop theories of understanding based on data from the real world. The ultimate goal of this approach is to derive theories that are grounded in the data collected.
* **Case study**—is an in-depth study of a single research subject—a program, an event, an activity, or group of individuals.
* **Ethnography**—is a descriptive research approach that involves becoming a part of the culture you study. This model is based in the anthropological tradition of research. In this approach, the researcher would spend a long time becoming immersed in the culture of the population being studied.
* **Generic or basic qualitative inquiry**—basic qualitative methodology—an approach to eliciting opinions, attitudes, beliefs, or descriptions of experiences that is oriented toward issues external to the participants. An open-ended subjective opinion survey about people’s political beliefs would be an example.

**Directions***:* Please answer the following questions about the methodology for Sample Article 2.

1. The research design is stated and there is a detailed description of how the study will be conducted.

**Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree**

1. The methods and procedures for data collection are clearly described.

**Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree**

1. The research design is suitable to answer the research questions.

**Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree**

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| To evaluate the research evidence, it is important to know who the participants are and how they were chosen. *Sampling* refers to the process of obtaining the research participants to be part of the study. The sampling section should clearly indicate the specific procedures used to recruit the participants. It should also indicate the sample size and the eligibility criteria.  |

1. The researcher clearly describes how participants were recruited and selected.

**Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree**

1. The sampling strategy was clearly explained.

**Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree**

### Section 3: Information Specific to Qualitative Methodology

In presenting the results of a qualitative research study, there needs to a clear and detailed description that includes direct quotes from data collected from the participants. One way in which the quality of the research results can be judged is by the reaction of the reader. Are the results believable? The reader should be able to say, “I understand,” or “That makes perfect sense.” The presentation of the data should convince the reader of the credibility of the data analysis.

The results section of a qualitative study is a written presentation that includes the voices of the participants, the reflections of the researcher and an interpretation of the answer to the research question and problem (Creswell, 2007).

"A weak or unconvincing analysis can also stem from a failure to provide adequate examples from the data…The researcher needs to make sure that their interpretations and analytic points are consistent with the data extracts" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pp. 94–95).

**Directions**: Please answer the following questions specific to a qualitative methodology.

1. The presentation of the data permits the reader to understand how the results were interpreted.

**Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree**

1. The direct quotes from the transcribed interviews support each category in the analysis.

**Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree**

### Section 4: Analysis, Findings, Discussion, and Ethics

When evaluating an article, look first for the scientific research evidence. Again, examples of nonscientific evidence are opinions, value judgments, personal experiences, unsupported assertions, and second-hand reports.

When you are dissecting the findings of the study or what the researcher wants you to believe, certain questions can help with this evaluation. How do you decide what evidence to believe? The following questions will be helpful.

* Where is the evidence (in qualitative, the words of the participants)?
* How do I know that is true? Can I see it in the participants’ words?
* Does the author support it with the participants’ words?
* Is the research evidence relevant to the key issue being studied?
* Does the researcher draw the correct conclusion form the evidence?
* Is information missing?

Researchers are susceptible to confirmation bias, meaning that there can be a tendency to confirm personal beliefs, and this is equally true in qualitative analysis. When evaluating a research article it is important to be aware of possible confirmation bias, and of your own personal beliefs, so that you objectively review whether the results have been reasonably presented and interpreted. The results section must thoroughly explain how the data was collected and how the data was analyzed. The results must be described in detail in order to justify the conclusions or the interpretations of the data.

**Directions**: After you have read the results presented in Article 2, answer the following questions.

1. The results are presented in enough detail to allow the reader to evaluate the results.

**Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree**

1. The conclusions and generalizations are valid and justified by the data analysis.

**Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree**

1. The researchers considered other possible interpretations of the results.

**Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree**

1. The discussion is reasonable in view of the data presented.

**Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree**

1. The research question was answered.

**Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree**

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| Ethics in research is of particular importance. For purposes of this exercise, some fundamental ethical concerns are listed here.* Informed consent should be in the form of a written statement that fully informs the participant of the nature of the research project and what is expected of participants. The researcher has the informed consent form signed by the participant.
* Harm and loss of dignity refers to the right to self esteem and protection from harm. Involvement in the study should not be physically or mentally harmful to the participants.
* Privacy and confidentiality relates to procedures to ensure that information is stored in locked areas and no one outside of the researchers will have access to participants’ records. The researcher must protect the anonymity of the participants.
* Participants should be informed that they have the right to decline or withdraw from the research at any time without consequences.
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1. There is no evidence of ethical violations for this study.

**Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree**

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| After presenting the results, the researcher interprets the implications of the research findings. This includes recommendations for further research and suggestions for relevant application of the research findings. Did the authors identify directions or recommendations for future research? Did the authors propose what the next steps are for studies in their topical areas in light of previous literature and their findings? |

1. The researcher clearly states the implications and applications of the research.

**Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree**

1. This research has contributed to the field of psychology or to the field of human services. (Why or why not should be discussed with your table.)

**Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree**

1. The researcher offers a reflection on the limitations of the study including the research design.

**Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree**

Please keep this list of questions and train yourself to use them to dissect all the articles in your literature review on the research topic. After using it frequently, you will not need the list, because the questions will come more naturally. Using the questions to train yourself will also allow you to keep deepening your knowledge of the elements of a well constructed research article.

References

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101.

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Creswell, J. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Leedy, P. D., & Ormrod, J. E. (2005). *Practical research: Planning and design* (8th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall. ISBN 0131108956.