

INFO 272. Qualitative Research Methods

Evaluating Qualitative Research

Fall 2014

Typical Reactions

- ❖ is not **generalizable** / is “anecdotal”
- ❖ The sample is too small to say anything / is not a random sample / **not representative**
- ❖ What is the **hypothesis** you are testing?
- ❖ Great stories, but can you **show me some data** that supports your claims?
- ❖ is subjective, the researcher’s presence in the setting biases the data
- ❖ **lacks rigor**, procedure is unsystematic

Becker - the epistemology of qual research

Quantitative Tradition

Reliability – reproducing the findings through the same procedures, same findings from

Validity – whether and how well the researchers measured the phenomenon they claimed to be dealing with

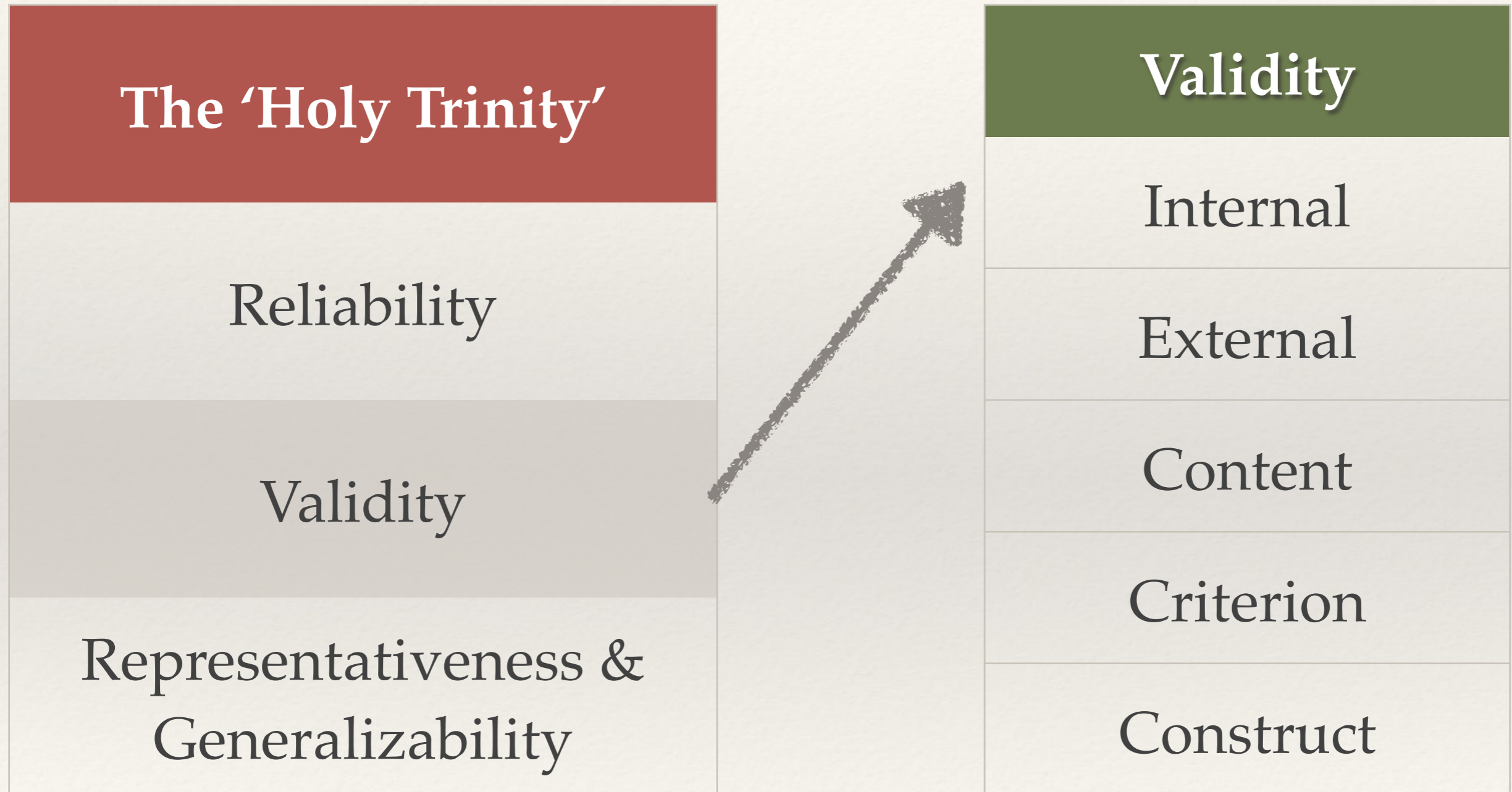
Qualitative Tradition

Accuracy – based on close observation not remote indicators

Precision – captures a fine-grained account of the phenomenon including its dimensions and variation

Breadth – knowledge of a broad range of matters that touch on the topic

Criteria for Quantitative Research



Functional Equivalence

- ❖ Criteria for evaluating quantitative research is not directly applicable to qualitative research
- ❖ Can we draw out some abstract, general standards and then respecify for qualitative research?
- ❖ Kvale on an epistemological stance that does not subscribe to the 'correspondence theory of truth' = defensible (rather than absolute) knowledge claims, requires argumentation

Functional Equivalence

Quantitative Tradition	Qualitative Tradition
Reliability of measures (c)	Triangulation and Reflexivity (c)
Internal Validity (c)	Transparency & Procedural Clarity (c)
Samples size (c)	Corpus Construction (c, r)
Representative Sampling (r)	Thick Description (c, r)
External Validity (r)	Local Surprise (r)
Validity of Measures (r)	Communicative Validation (r)

c = confidence, r = relevance

Triangulation and Reflexivity

- ❖ Triangulation:
 - ❖ Combining different perspectives, different methods
 - ❖ Preserving contradictions
- ❖ Reflexivity:
 - ❖ Sense of the researcher in the field (and how their presence was grappled with)



i.e. interviews about Internet use supplemented by observation

Transparency

Good
documentation
of procedures
and data

Appendix 1. List of Interviewed Market Women

Name ⁴	Generational group	Good	Market
Mary ('Obolo')	Ohemma	Yam trader/wholesaler	A
Overall Market	Ohemma	Cloth/textiles	A
Ohemma			
Mama Grace	Ohemma	Smoked fish	A
Bernice	Transitional daughter	Tomatoes and garden eggs	A
Mama Akosua	Ohemma	Cloth/textiles, shoes, clothing accessories	A
Manuela	Transitional daughter	Cloth/textiles, shoes, clothing accessories	A
Precious	Transitional daughter	Plastic goods, cooking pots, utensils	A
Yam Wholesaler		Yams	A
Naa	Transitional daughter	Smoked fish	A
Mercy	Transitional daughter	Toiletries imported from Netherlands	A
Hamdiya	Mother	Spices	A
Loretta	Daughter	Chinese imported shoes (wholesaler)	Makola
Dorothy	Mother	Chinese imported shoes	Makola
Akua	Daughter	Beauty products	Makola

Corpus Construction

- ❖ Maximizing the diversity of unknown representations and mapping those representations
- ❖ ‘External validity’ and generalizability as a matter of argumentation (rather than calculation)

Thick Description

- ❖ ‘High-fidelity’ reportage: verbatim quotes – demonstrating the *provenance* of a claim (also transparency again)
- ❖ But also, do you get a whole picture of the social world, its elements, and how they are interlinked? Especially the meaning of the social phenomenon (winks vs. blinks)

Local Surprise

- ❖ Surprise in relation to a common-sense view
- ❖ Surprise in relation to theoretical expectation
- ❖ Solely confirming evidence (just as totally consistent evidence) should raise suspicion

Communicative Validation

- ❖ Traditionally in the sciences, peer review from fellow researchers.
- ❖ Also, from research participants
- ❖ Researchers role in translation (relevance criteria), big picture, not just reproducing participants view of themselves (role of critique)

The Future of Evaluation?

Websites and digital archives that make qualitative data accessible to the public



What to look for in Qual Studies:

- ❖ Methods are visible, explained
- ❖ data (to the extent possible) is available – quotations, appendix of informants, etc.
- ❖ evidence of continual verification *in situ*, triangulation, counter-examples, contradictions
- ❖ evidence of closeness to the social phenomenon, grappling with researcher's presence / role, and surprises