Being Lost and Becoming Reoriented with the Massive Landscape:
Students and Instructors' Reflections on Family Science Qualitative Research Methods Courses

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ABSTRACT. We continue the dialogue within Family Science about the pedagogical culture of qualitative research methods. Despite the rapidly growing enterprise of qualitative research, there has been minimal discussion in Family Science literature of content and teaching practices used in Family Science qualitative research methods courses. In response, we collected data primarily from graduate students enrolled in qualitative research methods courses and Family Science qualitative methods instructors. Using these data, we analyzed experiences and reflections of both groups. We offer recommendations for qualitative research methods in Family Science.

Keywords: pedagogy, qualitative, research methods

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Inspired by repeated calls to action and our own tensions in learning and later teaching qualitative methods, we set out to explore research methods pedagogy from perspectives of students enrolled in a Family Science qualitative methods courses and of instructors who teach qualitative research methods (QRM) courses in Family Science (FS). Our primary aim was to examine experiences of learners and instructors in order to understand both groups' shared and unique experiences.

In the first part of this decade, Wagner, Garner, and Kawulich (2011) published a systematic review of scholarly literature on teaching social science research methods. They argued that there is still a need to address the many challenges of teaching and learning research methods. They also called for "substantial theoretical and empirical" attention to the issue (p. 82). In an earlier piece, these authors suggested that in order to be effective at teaching research methods, instructors must understand *how* students approach research methods courses, including obstacles they encounter (Kawulich, Garner, & Wagner, 2009). Davis and Sandifer-Stech (2006) noted, "to date, family scientists have not examined the process and outcomes of research training. This training is a fundamental part of graduate education" (p. 56). Later, they recommended that, "family science instructors should conduct research on challenges to the process of research education in Family Studies" (p. 65).

Background

We begin by reviewing literature on the teaching of social science research methods in general, then we discuss scholarship on students' experiences of learning qualitative research methods. Next, we review literature on pedagogical concerns in teaching QRM. We conclude by situating instructors' experiences within FS.

Teaching Social Science Research Methods

Over the last several decades across social science disciplines, there have been thought-provoking discussions about the teaching and learning of QRM. These have focused on (a) the scope of research methods skills students need; (b) curricular models of where, when, and how students learn research methods skills during their degree programs; and (c) the importance of hands-on, experiential learning experiences to facilitate skill mastery.

Many discussions have addressed what research methods skills students should be acquiring as part of their training. Family scientists Ganong, Coleman, and Demo (1995) discussed competencies that Human Development and Family Science (HDFS) graduate students should master when completing their degrees. Among these competencies were skills in *both* qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. Similarly, Acock, van Dulmen, Allen, and Piercy (2005) provided a wide-angle view on techniques and perspectives researchers employ in their inquiry about families. In so doing, they asserted that "for the field to advance…we need to

have respect for, knowledge of, and expertise in a variety of methods" (p 60). This sentiment of training to be *bi-methodological,* was later echoed by Frey, Anderson, and Friedman (1998), and more recently by Parks, Faw, and Goldsmith (2011) within the field of Communications.

Another focus of these discussions was on the curricular manner in which students learn methodologies. Frey et al. (1998) and Parks et al. (2011) surveyed content of Communications research methods courses and found it was not unusual for the teaching of quantitative and qualitative methods to be combined into one course. This combined-model reflects arguments by some scholars who have encouraged graduate students to learn both qualitative and quantitative methods (McMullen, 2002; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). Along with finding a trend toward the model describe above, Park et al. also found that instruction in qualitative methods in Communications has increased since Frey et al.'s (1998) assessment. Despite this increase, Communication research methods courses "continue to emphasize quantitative methods at the expense of instruction in qualitative methods" (Parks et al., 2011, p. 416). Park and colleagues offered several recommendations for Communication that may translate well to Family Science curricular decision makers: (a) offer methods instruction earlier in a student's career, (b) make methods education a prerequisite for other courses in the curriculum, (c) incorporate methods education across the curriculum, and (d) separate instruction of quantitative and qualitative approaches into separate courses.

Another theme in these discussions was the teaching technique of experiential learning. Cuthbert, Arunachalam, and Licina (2012) argued that use of these hands-on activities and experiences serves an important role in student learning. They reported on their experiences as instructors and those of their students in a Sociology course focused on providing undergraduate students hands-on experiences with social science research activities. Cuthbert and colleagues argued that hands-on experience is important to the process of moving students (particularly undergraduates) "from being primarily a consumer of knowledge to becoming one of its producers" (p. 138). Similarly, Myatt (2009) suggested that this important developmental transition for students is essential to preparing students for higher-level graduate research expectations. Despite this, Parks et al. (2011) note that only a small percentage (20%) of courses they surveyed in Communication used hands-on or experiential learning to teach research methods skills. Other interesting approaches recently offered as teaching techniques/tools for providing students with safe places to practice qualitative research skills include the use of Second Life (a 3-dimensional virtual environment) and a technique inspired by the television show *Undercover Boss* (Graham & Schuwerk, 2017; Kawulich & D'Alba, 2015).

Learning Qualitative Research Methods

Most published research exploring students' experiences in learning QRM focuses on well-documented intellectual struggles, strong reactions, and feelings of disorientation when it comes to learning about QRM (Booker, 2009; Borochowitz, 2005; Magolda, 1999; O'Conner & O'Neill, 2004; Reisetter et al., 2003; Roulston & Shelton, 2015). Onwuegbuzie (1998, 2001) refers to this as students' (both undergraduate and graduate) pre-instructional beliefs about research methods courses in general that manifest as fear and anxiety (e.g., statistics, writing). "Pre-instructional beliefs" about learning research methods have received some scholarly

attention (Booker, 2009; Borochowitz, 2005; Jackson & Wolski, 2001). Roulston and Shelton similarly note that positivist notions of science and knowledge creation are "omnipresent in society" (p. 332).

Borochowitz (2005) argues that students' discomfort in learning QRM can be attributed to a couple of sources. First, students' pre-instructional beliefs develop in social contexts that reinforce a dominant worldview that values quantitative or statistical data.

> This worldview, according to which "size does matter," leads the students to be preoccupied with questions such as: How many participants do I need? (who they are is of secondary importance); How many questions should the interview guide consist of? (the content it should cover is of secondary importance); and most common – How many themes should be drawn from each interview? (Borochowitz, 2005, p. 351)

Students' reactions are connected to *explicitly* learning about paradigms (Booker, 2009; Borochowitz, 2005), defined broadly as "a set of beliefs that guide action" (Guba, 1990, p. 17), drawing on epistemological (how do we know what we know?) and ontological (what is reality?) assumptions (Daly, 2007; Guba, 1990). Students' responses are explained partly by cognitive shifts they are asked to undergo when first exposed to interpretative, critical, and postmodern paradigms after establishing firm, possibly unexamined grounding in positivism or post-positivism paradigms (Borochowitz, 2005).

Second, younger students (e.g., undergraduates or early graduate students) may not yet be developmentally capable of accepting existence of multiple realities or multiple truths (Perry, 1998). These experiences and characteristics of students can be barriers to their learning and to instructors' teaching of qualitative research methods (Borochowitz, 2005).

Teaching Qualitative Research Methods

Many scholars have written about teaching qualitative research methods (e.g., Booker, 2009; Borochowitz, 2005; Breuer & Schreier, 2007; DeLyser, 2008; Eakin & Mykhalvoskiy, 2005; Franklin, 1996; Hunt, Mehta, & Chan, 2009; LaRossa, 2005; O'Conner & O'Neill, 2004; Reisetter et al., 2003; Roulston & Shelton, 2015; Sharp, Humble, Zvonkovic, Richards, & Radina, 2009). Some acknowledged that because many students of QRM experience psychological discomfort and confusion, this warrants a non-traditional approach to teaching (Breuer & Schreier, 2007; Lincoln, 1998; Mullen, 2000). For example, Jackson and Wolski (2001) found that using an interactive, online format incorporating "argumentative dialogues" helped students alter their pre-instructional beliefs (p. 191).

Use of hands-on activities can be just as important as (if not more important than) course readings, lectures, and discussions (DeLyser, 2008). This claim reflects that of Cuthbert et al. (2012) regarding the teaching and learning of social science research methods in general. According to Breuer and Schreier (2007), this approach to teaching QRM specifically "entails different assumptions concerning teaching and learning processes" (p. 5). They eloquently state,

> If qualitative methods are nothing but "technique"- a number of procedural steps which are to be implemented in this and no other order, independent of the concrete object or the specific research question - then students can learn these procedures from textbooks or by means of observation. Learning a "craft", on the other hand (so the argument goes), ultimately requires students to cooperate in carrying out relevant activities. This type of knowledge cannot be acquired from textbooks or in other ways that remove the learner from the concrete situation in which the research is carried out. (p. 5)

Similarly, Borochowitz (2005) recommends that gradually introducing qualitative epistemology is important for addressing students' anxieties and resistance to QRM. As a result of this approach, and the reality that students' anxieties about QRM may occur anytime in the learning process, instructors and mentors are often called on to provide time-consuming, extensive guidance (O'Conner & O'Neill, 2004). Second, it must be acknowledged that for students being trained to pursue independent research (e.g., doctoral students), one semester of instruction is likely insufficient (DeLyser, 2008). Given the time-consuming nature of long-term apprenticeship that the process of teaching and learning QRM often requires, program and institutional commitment to supporting excellence in teaching QRM is essential to instructor and student success (O'Conner & O'Neill, 2004).

Teaching QRM in Family Science

Although many scholars have written about their experiences teaching qualitative research methods, most accounts are by scholars outside FS, with the exceptions of Franklin (1996), Gilgun (1999), LaRossa (2005), and Humble and Sharp (2012). Therefore, the dialog about "pedagogical culture" related to qualitative research in FS may be described as more of a quiet conversation than a boisterous debate (Garner, Wagner, & Kawulich, 2009, p. 2). To be sure, there are examples within FS of scholars sharing their approaches to teaching or offering texts aimed at mentoring and/or teaching novice researchers (e.g., Daly, 2007; Gilgun, 1999; LaRossa, 2005). The part of the conversation that is lacking in FS is work that invites instructors to reflect on what they teach, how they teach it, and where they may experience struggle or triumph. For those serving as teachers and/or mentors for future FS scholars, this missing piece of the conversation should be viewed with concern. Guidance from those who have walked the same paths and are scholars in the same discipline may be a valuable resource. That is, while conversations about how and what to teach that occur in Communications and Sociology may be useful, they may not address the potentially nuanced perspectives on QRM within FS.

One example of such a resource is Humble & Sharp (2012)., who pointed to the isolation of QRM instructors and engaged in peer journaling to so that instructors would be less isolated and could support each other while they both began teaching separate FS graduate level QRM courses. Humble and Sharp identified larger tensions of methods courses, such as balancing skills and conceptual knowledge, and offered hands-on activities and resources.

LaRossa (2005), a family scientist, detailed how, when teaching grounded theory methodology, he uses a set of Tinkertoys ® as a

> show and tell…because it allows me to demonstrate both the mechanics and aesthetics of selective coding…I tell them that a good candidate for core-variable status is the spool that has the most connections to other spools...I begin to rotate the configuration, moving different spools and sticks to the foreground and other spools and sticks toward the back. Because the configuration is a three-dimensional mock-up, there are numerous ways that different spools and sticks can be "accentuated." (p. 851)

Such clear, detailed examples of how to convey complex, sometimes abstract ideas within QRM are useful to novice and experienced instructors.

The prevalence of QRM continues to grow alongside an increasing diversity in approaches and techniques. Meanwhile, scholarly and published discussions about processes of teaching and learning QRM are not keeping pace. A stark, artificial divide between qualitative and quantitative research in FS persists, whereby most scholars are considered "uni-researchers," having specialization and training in only one methodology (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005). Although these scholars meant either qualitative or quantitative, we, like other scholars, also raise concerns about being a uni-scholar *within* qualitative methodology (LaRossa, 2012). These issues raise important questions about how future scholars ought to be trained in FS research methods.

Brief Background of Authors

Both authors are highly invested in student growth and especially devoted to students' development as it relates to understanding qualitative research. Data in Study 1 are from the first author's selective family science qualitative research methods course, which she created and has taught three times. Along with teaching QRM in a formal course setting, the first author has maintained a student qualitative research team for over a decade (Radina, 2015). In leading these teams, the first author trains students on qualitative research perspectives and techniques and engages students in hands-on learning through active participation in study design, data collection, analysis, and national peer-reviewed presentations. Her research team conducted the interviews for study 2. The second author teaches a required doctoral HDFS QRM course. Working with a colleague in her department, she created the course in 2006. She has taught it once a year since then. The course is central to the Ph.D. departmental qualifying examination. More than 60 students have completed the course; all but 5 were Ph.D. students and about two-thirds were HDFS students.

Methods

This paper is based on data from learners and instructors of FS qualitative research methods courses in two separate but related research projects. The first project took place over a six-year period and included data from open-ended blog posts of primarily graduate students enrolled in three separate offerings of the first author's undergraduate/graduate course entitled "Qualitative Methods in Family Studies." The second project involved interviews with instructors of HDFS undergraduate and graduate qualitative methods courses across the US, (note: although the authors teach QRM, we are not included as participants in Study 2).

Study 1: Student Data from QRM Course Blogs

This study used data gathered from students in an upper-level undergraduate/graduate-level QRM course, "Qualitative Methods in Family Studies" that the first author taught. The course takes a broad perspective on QRM, exposing students to epistemology, data collection and analysis techniques, and QRM software. One course requirement was to write regular blog entries. The first author sought Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to use students' blog posts as data about their experiences in learning qualitative research methods.

Data collection: Course blogs. Across three offerings of the course, students were required to write a minimum of four blog entries. They were expected to discuss course content and readings and to comment regularly on one another's blog posts. All blog posts can be viewed and commented on by all other course members. No expectations about length of posts were set. Students received points that were assigned as credit/no credit. With the aim of creating a non-evaluative environment where students could share authentic insights, the instructor did not evaluate the quality of posts.

Description of students. Identities of students who posted blogs were removed prior to analysis. Therefore, it is not possible to provide specific descriptive data on which students' blogs were used for analysis. Instead, we describe the entire enrollment in the three offerings of the course to provide readers with as much information as possible regarding possible backgrounds of students. Thirty-one students enrolled in the course (class size ranged from 9-12 students). Of these, 22 were graduate students (20 masters level, 2 doctoral level), eight were upper-level undergraduate students, and one was a university librarian auditing the course. Most students were master's students in Family and Child Studies (n=18), FS majors (n=5), or double majoring (n=3) in FS and another discipline (e.g., Psychology, Speech Pathology and Audiology). Other graduate students (n=4), who were not pursuing a degree in FS, were studying Psychology, Chemistry, Social Work, or Sports Studies. Since the course has a pre-requisite of a social science research methods course, it is assumed that all students entered the course with basic understanding of research methods. All students were over 18 years of age and were predominately female (n=27). Slightly more than half of these students were Caucasian (n=18), nine were African American or of African descent (e.g., Ghana, Zimbabwe), two were Asian American or of Asian descent (e.g., Korea), and two were Hispanic/Latina. Seven international students were enrolled in the course.

Ethical considerations. After the course ended, students were invited to provide written consent for the use of their blog postings in presentation/publication. To avoid coercion to consent, students were individually e-mailed consent information by a trained research assistant and asked to reply to the e-mail stating their consent. In data analysis, only blog postings from students who granted consent were used. To further protect students' identities, the research assistant was granted temporary, time-limited access to the blog site. During that time the research assistant downloaded all blogs into a Word document, deleted blogs from students who did not provide consent and removed student names and other identifying information from the document. Of the 31 students enrolled in the three offerings of the course, 19 students consented to the use of their blog posts for this study. The result was 101 blog posts, an average of roughly five posts per student, which equated to 64 pages of data. Students' blog posts ranged in length from 200-2000 words. All excerpts from students' blogs are presented without identifying information about the students who wrote them.

Analysis process. The first author approached the analysis of blog posts with an eye toward emerging and striking ideas expressed across blog posts. She was also attentive to themes in the pedagogical literature, including the cognitive dissonance that students of QRM are known to exhibit (e.g. Magolda, 1999), developmental readiness of students to learn QRM (e.g., Borochowitz, 2005), and learning by doing (e.g., Cuthbert et al. 2012). She was also attuned to larger patterns around appreciating, expanding, and improving the terrain of QRM in FS from earlier work (Sharp, Zvonkovic, Humble, & Radina, 2014). The research question guiding analysis was: What are students' experiences in learning qualitative research methodology? This allowed us to gain insight on the phenomenological experience of learning qualitative research methods. Inspired by Charmaz (2014), the first author read all blog posts several times and coded sentences and/or paragraphs according to these sensitizing concepts. She then shared her categorizing of students' ideas that were reflected in their blog posts with the second author, who also read the blog posts several times. The two authors then engaged in focused coding, including discussion about categorizations and negotiations, to identify agreed upon modifications that they felt best represented the patterns operating in the data.

Findings: Study 1. Four patterns from students' blog posts were identified. These included (1) Becoming re-oriented: Grappling with epistemological/ontological issues, (2) Feeling lost and wanting a roadmap (i.e., begging for specific directions), (3) Learning by actively exploring the qualitative landscape, and (4) Appreciating the qualitative landscape. These themes are presented in this order to demonstrate how being able to appreciate QRM involves processes identified in the first three themes.

Becoming re-oriented: Grappling with epistemological/ontological issues. One predominant theme was that students struggled with epistemological and/or ontological considerations. This included students' statements expressing difficulty, frustration, confusion, etc. about understanding differences between quantitative and qualitative approaches. Some students were preoccupied with questions of *what* and *why*. Within this theme there were two sub-themes: Coming from a Quantitative Upbringing and Understanding Credibility and Bias.

Coming from a quantitative upbringing. Two students wrote specifically about how they struggled to understand and appreciate qualitative research methods because their previous training in research methods had been strictly quantitative/positivist.

> Throughout the first four weeks of this class, I have been struggling a lot with understanding the efficacy of qualitative methods. Having come from a strictly quantitative background in psychology, it has been drilled into my head that quantitative methods are inherently better, stronger, and have more applicability to bigger issues. Thus, I think that the best thing that has developed, for me, from the readings of the past few weeks is that I am slowly being absolved of my heavy bias toward the more quantitatively driven methods…(Student A, Group 1)

Note that the student below chose to describe the process of appreciating qualitative methods as having to "absolve" oneself of "heavy bias" towards quantitative methods. *Absolving* has a religious connotation and creates imagery of considerable labor.

Understanding credibility and bias. Students also expressed difficulties when challenged to examine their predispositions to positivist understandings of bias and social location in research.

> Folks, [I] am having difficulties agreeing with some of the philosophies underlining [quantitative] research, and any of you could help me out. In the first place, is there any [such] thing as objective reality under this sun? And is there any [such] thing as context free research? Personally, I see all those philosophies as faulty which [sic] doesn't hold any water. (Student J, Group 1)

These same struggles often led to concerns about how to judge rigor or credibility of qualitative research.

> [From our reading] the idea of researchers applying both empathy and imagination seems to be the opposite of all that I have ever been told about doing research. I realize that some researchers believe that by dismissing their preconceived ideas and applying the principles of reflexivity they can effectively reduce their biases. But how do you reduce bias if you really don't have any prior to doing the research? (Student F, Group 2)

> Since I am very meticulous and always searching for the "one and only right answer" it was really challenging for me to accept the fact that other students came up with different themes [during an in-class data analysis activity]. (Student D, Group 2)

These students were often exploring these ideas, along with the realization that there are multiple ways to approach social research, for the first time. Since students entered the course having had social science research methods coursework, we might assume that this idea of multiplicity of acceptable epistemologies had not been presented to them before. Such concerns were often lingering preoccupations for students throughout the course. As indicated in the Park et al.

recommendations (2011), there is considerable value in exposing students early and infusing qualitative methodologies into the curriculum.

Feeling lost and needing a road map. As the literature suggests, many students' experiences with learning QRM revolve around wanting and even demanding to understand specifics of how to do qualitative research, with an emphasis on wanting to learn how to do it correctly or "the right way." Some students focused mainly on the *how* rather than the questions of *what* or *why*. Questions and comments in this vein included asking about basic techniques or strategies, such as how many data sources are needed, how to stay true to the data while also allowing for the researcher's interpretations, what it means to be "well grounded in the data," how to position/present oneself to interviewees, how to code data, how to conduct a data audit/prepare an audit trail, and how to transcribe. Others had more complex requests for how QRM is conducted:

> How do we know when we have chosen the most effective methodology for specific projects if we are continually biased by our chosen paradigms? Daly writes about sampling until you've reached theoretical saturation, but my question is, how do you know when you've gotten there? Is it merely when you begin hearing the same things over and over from your participants leading you to assume that you've learned everything you can about participants with these certain attributes you are studying? Is there more to saturation than just repetition of ideas and themes? If so, how do we recognize it? (Student A, Group 1)

Along with basic questions about technique and a desire to learn the "exact" or "most effective" qualitative research techniques, some students questioned their understanding of the processes they were learning and expressed concerns about whether they were "doing it right." Examples of this reaction included statements similar to the following:

> First, I would like to say that I despise transcribing. It is miserable...sometimes I question my sense of hearing because I struggle so much listening to the tape. It is as if I can't understand the English language and I have a hearing problem, which always boosts my confidence Ha! Also, what is up with my 1st interview being 70 minutes!!!! It appears that the class average…was 35 min. What did I do wrong? Maybe I got a talker or I kept encouraging her to tell me more. I don't know--maybe it is my interviewing style. I would like to discuss what we did as interviewers such as: our behaviors, patterns, tendencies, the way we asked the questions. I would like this because I believe it could help us hear the diversity maybe get ideas or even warnings of dos and don'ts. That feeling of "Am I doing this right?" seems to always creep up and yet when it comes to qualitative, it is very much a creative process where the possibilities are endless, which sounds almost frightening for those of us that like things to be more concrete and prefer rules and structure. (Student G, Group 1)

Learning by actively exploring the qualitative landscape. Students commented frequently on the importance of learning by doing via hands-on experiences with QRM in their blogs. They expressed preferences for or appreciation of learning QRM via actually conducting

qualitative data collection/analysis and other hands-on individual and group activities. For one student, learning about observation techniques in class using hands-on experience could be experienced and practiced outside the classroom:

> I found the section about observing in a *focused* way that allows me to see what people are really doing to be fascinating. I actually found myself putting it into practice this week! Just sitting in a coffee shop or at the carpool line to pick up my kids, I found myself watching people in ther [sic] natural settings and actually *observing* them with the intent of trying to *understand* how they viewed themselves in that social setting. (Student H, Group 2)

For other students, engaging in experiential learning helped them become aware of their own learning of QRM.

> This class, the readings, and the hands on expereince [sic] has and will continue to be invaluable to me as begin my journey as a researcher. I am glad we are going to analyze the data together because I have no idea how to do it. (Student G, Group 1)

> I think it is normal for first interview to be somehow unpleasant! I finished with my first interview for the class work and was not impressed at all, but the sebsequent [sic] one was encouraging. What I deduced from the interview was that, especially, for a first time interviewer, I would try the questions with somebody else before the actual interview. (Student I, Group 1)

For some students, having actual research experiences was important to helping them identify with and understand course materials in ways that may not have been possible otherwise.

> I have had the privilege of working on several group research projects in the past….I can attest that the Daly is correct in saying that actually doing the research is much different than reading about it. (Student H, Group 2)

> I can better relate to chapter nine after conducting my interview, about how the analysis in a sense is an ongoing process. There is not one specific point it occurs, but it occurs throughout the research. (Student C, Group 1)

Appreciating the qualitative landscape. A salient feature of the blogs was the focus on students gaining appreciation for QRM. This maps onto some of our recent work (Sharp et al., 2014), whereby we examined qualitative conceptual articles published in the top FS journals since 1985. Many of these centered on appreciating qualitative research, while others focused on expanding qualitative research (e.g., through new methodologies or by calling for more qualitative research). Only a few articles focused on improving qualitative research—i.e., articles offering critical and/or nuanced discussion of qualitative research in FS. With regard to expanding, we chose to broaden the definition from our earlier work to include comments written by students that reflected their curiosity about new methodologies, techniques, paradigms, or phenomena, as well as expanding their thinking about social research. Two

students made statements we classified as *expanding*. No students made comments that we considered *improving* (note: this is to be expected at their developmental stage).

Appreciating. Twelve of the 19 students wrote about appreciating qualitative research. This theme included students' comments reflecting their understanding and/or acknowledgement of the value of qualitative work in general and/or in FS specifically (i.e., focus on the *what*). Below, we provide a few exemplary quotes reflecting these students' appreciation of qualitative epistemologies and research strategies.

> This class as a whole has helped me to realize that there are research initiatives where the researcher not only has the capability to acknowledge their biases within the research, but is expected to do so. Coming from my strictly quantitative background in psychology where we attempt to dis-imbue biases through numbers and statistical tests, this is seemingly a strong revelation for me. (Student A, Group 1)

> It has never made sense to me why in the sciences and even social sciences quantitative [sic] research is so highly valued. It seems as if statistics and quantiative [sic] research only gives *one side of the story*, reducing human complexity down to nothing but simple algorithms and equations. (Student C, Group 2)

> I had this naïve illusion that qualitative research is easier than quantitative, since there are no math there just people's stories, however, after reading four chapters from Daly (2007), this illusion vanished. The more I learn about qualitative research the less I find it easy, there is actually NOTHING easy about it. Looking for patterns/themes or trying to establish a theory that would be grounded in collected data is a time-consuming, meticulous task and should be appreciated as much as work with numbers. (Student D, Group 2)

Expanding. Only two students made comments that fit with our conceptualization of *expanding*, which included statements that asked questions about, or expressed desires to learn about or explore new methodologies, techniques, paradigms, or phenomena, as well as broadening their thinking about social research. For example, one student wrote,

> I am beginning to think about how valuable it could be to diversify our methodology beyond merely qualitative methods in order to gain better method triangulation….there could be value in applying more qualitatively driven methods to the same social questions….What I am beginning to like most about qualitative methodology is that there is no inherent 'pretending' about being objective. As Morrow cites, "Depending on the underlying paradigm, we may work to limit, control, or manage subjectivity--or we may use embrace it and use it as data" (p. 254). One of the long-standing issues I have had with quantitative methods is that they are constantly proclaiming the objectivity of their results. However, I do not believe that in any sort of societally driven research that there can be complete objectivity. As we are learning more and more in this class that

subjectivity is not just acceptable, but even almost desired, it is a refreshing take on research for me. (Student A, Group 1)

Findings from Study 1 provide important insights to instructors, who may be far removed from their initial learning of QRM. Most important, students reported often feeling lost as they were exposed to different ways of thinking about how knowledge is created. This experience may be particularly pronounced for students who come to the QRM classroom with deep-seated positivist beliefs. Instructors should be aware of the potential for this experience and be prepared to help students find their way. Students also expressed desires to know the exact steps to follow to do qualitative research correctly. Exposure to diverse approaches to knowledge creation inherent in QRM can enhance students' feelings of being lost and confused. Instructors must similarly be prepared to help students as they begin understanding and appreciating the unique and diverse approaches available to them. Lastly, students often stated that getting their hands dirty by engaging with data directly (e.g., interviewing, transcription, analysis) was an important element that helped solidify the process in their thinking.

Study 2: Interviews with QRM Instructors

Based on preliminary findings from Study 1 that the first author presented at the Qualitative Family Research Network meeting at the annual meeting of the National Council on Family Relations (Sharp et al., 2009), we were curious about how QRM instructors experience students' learning in their courses. Were instructors actively grappling with the aforementioned issues identified by students? If so, how were instructors resolving these tensions? If not, what were prominent concerns of QRM instructors?

Participant recruitment. The first author sought IRB approval to conduct qualitative interviews with instructors of QRM courses. Participants were recruited through an announcement distributed to members of two email listservs organized by the National Council on Family Relations: Qualitative Family Research Network Focus Group and Research and Theory Section. Of the seven individuals who volunteered to be interviewed, five completed participation. Participants all earned doctorates in social science disciplines and ranged in their experience teaching qualitative methods courses between novice (e.g., one semester) and seasoned (e.g., 15 years of teaching the course). QRM courses that participants taught ranged from undergraduate only (including a first year course on field observations) to upper level undergraduate/graduate combined courses, to required doctoral level courses (one taught undergraduate only; two taught mixed graduate/undergraduate, and two taught graduate only). Some participants referred to one specific QRM course they had taught. Others referenced various courses or experiences they had teaching QRM, including mentoring students.

Data collection. Student research assistants enrolled in the first author's course Qualitative Methods in Family Studies conducted telephone interviews with participants. The first author trained student research assistants on interviewing techniques in advance. Interviews followed a semi-structured guide, asking instructors about their experiences teaching qualitative methods. Questions included (a) issues related to how they structured their course, (b) contexts in which the course is taught (e.g., the extent to which they were teaching QRM in a supportive

department and university), (c) their conceptualization of students as consumers and/or producers, (d) their decisions about emphasizing teaching skills and conceptual knowledge, (e) the course materials they use, (f) how instructors engaged with rigor in their courses, and (g) whether they had advice for other instructors. The audio from all interviews were digitally recorded and the student research assistant who conducted the interviews also transcribed them.

Analysis process. The second author read all transcripts, starting by trying to understand instructors' responses and then rereading transcripts, looking for salient ideas and emergent patterns as she compared and contrasted responses across interviews (Charmaz, 2014). She then shared the interviews (with the notes she took on them) and her list of running patterns and salient ideas with the first author. Then, both authors discussed and refined the patterns.

Findings: Study 2. Based on the process described above, three themes were gleaned from the data: (a) *"I don't pretend to be able to keep up…"* with the massive territory of QRM, (b) questioning instructional QRM materials, and (c) struggling with course content decisions. Of these, acknowledgement of the massive territory was the main theme threading through all others. All reporting of interview excerpts below have specific identifying information removed.

"I don't pretend to be able to keep up…" Instructors acknowledged the vast territory of qualitative research methods and made it clear that keeping up with the groundswell of information on qualitative methods was impossible. The most seasoned instructor in our sample foregrounded the volume of current and classic qualitative writings as her greatest challenge teaching QRM. She argued that while increasing interest in QR was a good sign, she finds it impossible to keep up with the "explosion" of writings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). She explained:

> Interviewer: Okay. And then what has been your biggest struggle…or …challenge that you've faced teaching qualitative research methods?
>
> Participant: … I think it's trying to keep up with it all... when I first started, the world of qualitative research almost 20 years ago was much smaller. It was really possible to know the main authors and keep up with what was being done in the field and that's become very difficult I think …and that's a good thing because it's become more popular but the scholarly work has just exploded really so the challenge for me has been to try to keep up so that I actually feel like I'm still one step ahead of my students….And like I said, that's a good challenge. It really means that qualitative research has found more acceptability. We're more widespread but at the same time there's just so much information out there that there's so much to keep up with.
>
> Interviewer: …are you satisfied with the texts and readings that are available about qualitative research?
>
> Participant: I think that they have just really blossomed in the last decade especially there's almost too many to choose from I don't pretend to be able to keep up with them all.

This participant's claim points to a challenge many instructors are likely to experience in teaching QRM. One might also interpret this feeling of being overwhelmed as similar to what students experience when they feel lost on entering the territory of QRM.

Questioning instructional materials. A specific manifestation of the massive QR territory is the challenge to identify course readings that cover content knowledge and explanations of QRM skills. One instructor argued that assigning journals articles set the context for the textbook, thereby positioning the textbook as central and articles as supplemental. Conversely, another participant indicated that she found a dearth of family scholars' published peer-reviewed journal articles about conducting and thinking about qualitative research. Below, she muses about larger conditions that may be stifling such discussions:

> I guess I know one of the things you are interested in is qualitative research within the family studies department. That's one of things you will see in my syllabus, that I actually draw a lot from the nursing field and their journals. They seem to have much more methodological pieces and more scholarship things they publish that is the personal experiences and *I think that it's a shame that we don't have more of that from family scholars that we could actually you know draw from.* [emphasis added] Are journals…intent on not…publish[ing] those types of pieces?...and we need to make space for those types of pieces because they are pivotal for methods of getting real lived experiences. They are key to this field, that would definitely be something the field would benefit from if we would have begun to look at those pieces, more methodological pieces versus just full research content pieces.

This points to a concern for those teaching QRM regarding what sources to use as readings and reference material in course development. Participants were struggling with positioning textbooks and journal articles as central to their courses. Given that findings from Study 1 above suggest that students think they need that "road map" for conducing QRM, identifying such instructional materials is important for instructors to consider carefully.

Struggling with course content decisions. Another theme emerging from the massive territory of QR is a tension about what to cover and trying to determine what students must know specifically about QRM. Three sub-themes were identified: (a) emphasizing conceptual knowledge versus practical skills, (b) balancing breadth vs. depth, and (c) teaching about credibility and bias.

Several instructors discussed ways they front-loaded conceptual issues in their courses (textbooks do this as well). For example, one instructor reported:

> Some [students] thought it was difficult because they had a hard time conceptualizing qualitative research and what you do. So, they understood the data collection, per say, but not really the whole conceptualizing and thinking through of the whole project on qualitative and the constructivist theory. So, I think its important that skills of sorts are built along that path. Several of our graduates have ended up finding that this class has been an asset to them in getting jobs. So I have tried to build in more and more skill

building ideas as I've been teaching the class over the years so they have more of those skills to draw on.

Other instructors stressed the value of practical skills:

> For those teaching I would suggest that they try to build as many skills and activities into their courses they can that makes sense if they have the time for. I think that research methods, learning research methods is an hands on activity so having those projects activities and assignment that help build skills is key to good research methods class.

Of course, this tension of balancing conceptual and practical is central in *all* research methods courses—this is not unique to QRM.

Balancing breadth v. depth. Another struggle related to determining course content is whether or not teaching one analysis technique is adequate when there are myriad ways to engage with ("code"/ "encounter") data. One instructor told us that she taught one analysis technique: the technique she uses the most frequently in her own research.

> I have given them a couple as examples, …because when I was a student, I liked to see what my professors had written, how they wrote and spoke, and it could help them. But I gave them other examples, too. Especially because they were wanting to know…right now they're writing about their results...their findings. So, I gave them a bunch of examples some of which were my own with the language I taught them…

Although this is practical and reasonable, it points to important issues related to learning only one analytic technique. This balance between learning one QRM technique and learning several as a trainee is certainly a struggle for both instructors and students. Acock and colleagues (2005) would argue that the goal should be to expose students to multiple methods. This creates the challenge of selecting which approaches to include and which to exclude.

Teaching about credibility and bias. In Study 1, we found that students expressed genuine struggle with how issues of credibility and bias are handled in QRM. We also found that instructors approached concepts of credibility, bias, and rigor in various ways. Some instructors indicated spending considerable time and giving direct attention to the topic of rigor; others, less so. One instructor explained how she taught these concepts by helping students understand issues of "trustworthiness."

> Interviewer: …Do you discuss rigor in your class?

> Participant: Yes, I spend quite a bit of time actually… we talk about it. I use the term trustworthiness but…quite a lot of the points that they have ascribed to their final product is around trustworthiness issues. So we talk about the whole range of credibility, transferability, … and conformability. Different ways that they can establish what is akin to the reliability of quantitative work. I really make a big point of that because to me the acceptance of qualitative research has a lot to do with see it has progressed.

Taking an indirect approach, another instructor allowed students to bring up questions about rigor on their own. She explained that she does so intentionally, to avoid appearing defensive about qualitative methods:

>Interviewer: How do you discuss rigor in your class? Is it something you cover extensively, or how does that come into play?
>
>Participant: I don't purposely discuss it, [emphasis added] but I assume the students will bring it up and they did. Especially all the ones who were in my class who already had a Ph.D. in psychology. So, uh, and we had talked about QM and that issue in that class, so um, it comes up. When I ask do you know anything about research they start wanting to know about, you know, how does this compare with, you know, this is how rigor is methodology, I just kind of let them bring it up. My feeling is that I don't want to go in with a defensive posture that I think the QM are rigorous in their own right and that I like to talk about those issues when they arise, but I don't want the defensive posture towards qualitative research.

This instructor's conceptualization of these issues brings up many questions and may point to how strongly marginalization of QR in the academy persists. Is the issue so large that consciously including issues of rigor in one's syllabus signals a defense tactic? Certainly, such a response by an instructor makes sense if she finds herself in a state where QRM are marginalized and students are entering her classroom with strongly rooted positivist thinking. Instructors may find themselves and their epistemologies challenged and questioned inside and outside the classroom. They must recognize this reaction as a possibility in order to be mindful of how they respond to students' natural, expected questioning, as Study 1 demonstrates.

Discussion

In this paper, we respond to consistent and frequent calls for empirical work and discussion about qualitative research methods in FS and the social sciences (e.g., Davis & Sandifer-Stech, 2006; Kawulich, Garner, & Wagner, 2009; Wagner et al., 2011). We chose to focus on experiences of learners and instructors of QRM in order to understand shared and unique experiences of both groups. Our findings extend the FS literature in several ways: (a) we showcased tensions students experience when learning QRM in FS courses, highlighting students' desires for road maps; (b) we empirically documented current tensions experienced by our sample of QRM FS instructors, who cogently acknowledged the overwhelming nature of the widespread qualitative landscape; (c) unlike most published work in this area, we juxtapose student and instructor tensions to show that they overlap and diverge; and (d), based on our analysis of Study 1 and Study 2 and our teaching experiences, we extend existing recommendations for QRM courses in FS. We believe our findings move toward the broad goal of promoting "competency" among FS students within a complicated, massive backdrop of QR (Ganong et al., 1995).

Student and Instructor Tensions: Overlap and Divergence

As they do in many published studies in this area (e.g., Magolda, 1999; Reisetter, Yexley, Bonds, Nikels, & McGenry, 2003), students in our research grappled with epistemological issues. At times, their responses suggested this was their first time being exposed to paradigms outside positivism. This may reflect that the recommendations of Park et al. (2011), such as earlier exposure to QRM and infusion of QRM in the curriculum, are not (yet) being implemented. Epistemology is inherently linked to rigor. Questions of how to best teach rigor and how to balance conceptual and practical issues were salient concerns of instructors we interviewed and are present in the wider literature (e.g., Humble & Sharp, 2012; Roulston & Shelton, 2015). Here, we see overlap among student and instructor concerns. Students' responses, however, tended to focus on pleas for prescription and instructors were wary of providing prescriptions (realizing that prescriptions map onto to positivistic paradigms). Student and faculty perceptions also converged on the importance of hands-on learning/practical skills. Consistent with the broader literature recommending practical/hands on skills (e.g., Park et al., 2011), students and instructors in our samples recognized the value of practical skills, with students enjoying the "learning by exploring." It is important to couch this in a discussion about growing concerns of uni-researchers within qualitative methods. For example, in our data, one faculty member teaches just one analytic technique. Teaching one analytic technique is understandable within the larger constraints of time, whereby instructors must teach survey courses.

Interestingly, students in Study 1 were not overwhelmed by the size of the territory, which suggests that the instructor of their course shielded them from being overwhelmed by the "explosion" of the qualitative landscape in the last few decades. Of course, we do not know if the same is true for students of instructors interviewed for Study 2. In Study 2, however, instructors expressed a need for better teaching materials, indicating that instructors themselves desired more guidance.

Recommendations and Implications

Following from both studies and our experiences, we offer several recommendations for FS QRM courses. With students, it has been useful to directly tell them about possible "earthquake" effects they will likely experience in a QRM course. After examining data from Study 1, the second author had a better appreciation of the cognitive shifts of her students and has since explicitly discussed the possibility of the earthquake. This has helped ease students' anxiety, normalize their experience, and foster a condition where they were able to learn more readily. One way to acknowledge the earthquakes is through student blogs. Based our data, we recommend use of student blogs similar to those used by the first author in her course. The blogs create a useful space for students to share their "shaky epistemological footing" in a public forum, which in turn they use to help each other struggle through their cognitive quakes, ease angst, and normalize the experiences.

Along with acknowledging student earthquakes, it is important that instructors acknowledge the formidable task they are charged with in teaching QRM in contemporary

contexts. Although acknowledging the huge territory is useful for QRM instructors, we recommend they situate their courses within the contexts of neoliberalism and post-positivism, with experimental designs (positivism) reemerging as the "gold standard" (Lather, 2006). However, we did not directly ask how instructors situate their courses, so they may already do this. This conversation brings into focus the large questions of rigor, which remains a central issue within the wider literature. For new instructors, we strongly suggest peer journaling (see Humble & Sharp, 2012 for more details). We also encourage more formal networking among QRM instructors and suggest a mentoring program whereby senior QRM instructors help new colleagues. We propose that national HDFS organizations set up a mentoring program similar to the Sociologists for Women in Society (SWS, sponsored by the American Sociology Association). On the SWS website, mentees fill out applications for mentorship and are matched with senior scholars.

On a structural level, the FS field and the social sciences should offer more QRM courses. Recognizing that one-shot survey courses were not enough, the University of Georgia offers an "Interdisciplinary Qualitative Studies" Certificate. The certificate includes an entire (first) course based on "design, concepts, and philosophy" (conceptual issues). The second course in the sequence is "data collection," the third is "data analysis" (both of these focus on practical skills), then students take an "advanced seminar on QRM" along with elective courses (including particular methodologies – e.g., an entire course on grounded theory or case studies) Like others who have addressed similar concerns in the literature, we argue that universities need to move in this direction to respond to the host of issues instructors are currently facing with burgeoning field of QR (O'Conner & O'Neill, 2005).

Limitations and Calls for Future Research

Both studies have limitations. First, students' responses were limited to their experiences in learning QRM from one instructor. Future research may benefit from cross-instructor and cross-institutional exploration of students' experiences and perspectives. Although blogs offered several advantages such as capturing real time reflections while students were in the course, they also have limitations. The blogs were restrictive because students were directed to focus their reflection on in-class discussions and/or class readings. While the nature of the specific posts was fairly open-ended, the use of blog posts or online discussion boards with even less direction may have yielded different information from students. At the same time, the instructor's choice of specific readings influenced the nature of students' blog reflections. Data from instructors also included those who teach undergraduate and graduate courses, as well as those with a wide-ranging set of experiences in teaching QRM. Generally, a more homogenous sample may be preferred for a study like this one (Morse, 1998).

The two studies presented here raised questions that ought to be considered and discussed more fully in peer-reviewed journals. In particular, what are pitfalls of overemphasizing skill development at the expense of theoretical, conceptual, and philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research? Similar to (Breuer & Schreier, 2007), we ask: what are the limits of promoting qualitative research where students follow all the "correct procedures" and techniques and produce non-compelling work? And on a broader scale, findings from study 2 and our own

experiences compel us to have public dialogues about "intelligibility" of qualitative methods. By acknowledging the massive territory, the feelings of being lost and not "pretending to keep up," and other prominent tensions of learning and teaching QRM in Family Science, we hope this paper adds to other "signposts" in the literature helping QRM instructors navigate the massive qualitative landscape.

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