

As I read the Denzin (2009) paper, I was a little surprised that, an apparently well-respected, social scientist would write such an inflammatory and poorly argued article. After a relatively thoughtful introduction, the author's writing quickly degenerates into a poorly reasoned, and at times contradictory, anti-establishment tirade. It also falls short of his stated objective of “chart[ing] a path of resistance” and proposing alternative criteria for evaluating qualitative research. As I read the article, I saw little more than complaints and criticism of the work done by other people, and very little in the way of alternative proposals or solutions.

At first glance, the article seems to be written by someone who is clearly resisting and adjusting to what appears to be a new reality. Denzin (2009) struggles against the encroachment of some of the more stringent and rigorous research practices into his field of study, and the apparent rejection of qualitative research practices. He seems to draw a clear distinction between qualitative and quantitative research and wishes to defend qualitative methods against what he views as an onslaught of evidence-based inquiry being imposed on his field by external forces. While I can empathize with his sense of apprehension, I am unconvinced by his argument.

Since I am limited here by the need to keep my journal entry brief, I will limit myself to pointing out a few of the flaws that I perceived in his argument.

Denzin (2009) spends some time trying to establish the incompatibility of qualitative and quantitative research, and dismisses mixed-methods research as “doomed to failure” due to the incompatibility of qualitative and quantitative forms, but never actually provides adequate support for his assertions. Denzin's assertions of incompatibility seem to be at odds with the work of Erican and Roth (2006), who successfully placed both types of research on the same continuum, and argued that qualitative research is capable of producing generalizable data in ways that are similar to and complementary to

quantitative modes.

Denzin points to the recommendations proposed by the NRC, such as ensuring qualified reviewers, promoting deep methodological knowledge in students, and the need to share data with the wider research community, as something that needs to be “resisted”. However, the 'threat' identified by Denzin doesn't seem particularly unreasonable to me.

Coming from a Biology background, I found his unwillingness to share his data with the research community – his claiming of its ownership – particularly alarming (and unethical). To me, sharing your research findings is one of the most important things you can do as a researcher. It allows others to interpret them. We all have different backgrounds and biases, so having multiple interpretations is more likely to lead to a better understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Like the parable of the blind men and the elephant – which Prof. Denzin seems to misunderstand – each one of us only perceives a small part of the big picture, so the more perceivers, the more complete the picture will become.

While my background hasn't necessarily prepared me to judge his research, Denzin seems to feel that he is the only one capable of interpreting it and doesn't wish to have anyone else, including his peers, looking at his data. To some, this could indicate a fear that even his peers would be unlikely to draw the same conclusions, and yet he bristles at the idea that his research may not be considered of good quality.

In his criticism of the focus on the need to show replicability and generalizability in research, Denzin seems to misrepresent the opposing argument. Denzin (2009) quotes Feuer et. al. saying that “a randomized experiment is the **best** method for **estimating** [causal] effects” , but then goes on to

criticize the proposed NRC framework for suggesting that “**only** quantitative data can be used to identify causal relationships” (emphasis is mine). There is a difference between “best” and “only”. By asserting that “there is no place in SREE (...) for qualitative research” (Denzin, 2009), he is essentially saying that qualitative research cannot be used in demonstrating effectiveness and causality, and yet Ercikan and Roth (2006) point to actual research where the opposite is true, simply through a small modification of the experimental design.

Denzin (2009) concludes with a list of recommendations, which could probably be summarized as: “We will not change! We are anti-establishmentarians! We do not recognize this Kangaroo Court!”. This is not particularly constructive and is unlikely to help with what is clearly a difficult issue being faced by social science researchers. The approach taken by Ercikan and Roth (2009) seems much more productive. In the end, I feel like Denzin has contributed little more than what most of us do when discussing our politicians or the Maple Leafs: he offers plenty of criticism – whether warranted or not – but little in the way of actual practical solutions.

## **References**

- Denzin, N. K. (2009). The elephant in the living room: or extending the conversation about the politics of evidence. *Qualitative Research*, 9(2) 139–160.
- Ercikan, K., & Roth, W-M. (2006). What good is polarizing research into qualitative and quantitative? *Educational Researcher*, 35, 14-23.