

Beyond Quantitative Measures: Researching Identity Formation and Development through the Qualitative Paradigm

Amina Isanović Hadžiomerović

Abstract

The main objective of this paper is to explore the potential of the qualitative research paradigm in addressing complex topics related to identity formation and development. There has been a shift in conceptualizations of education's purpose, with scholars arguing that the *paradigm of identity formation* (rather than the *paradigm of preparation*) should be promoted in educational contexts. This implies that education should aim to enhance personhood and facilitate the formation of personal identities in young individuals. Traditional quantitative studies, relying on statistical analyses of numerical data, are becoming less effective in providing insights into the increasingly diverse pathways of human development and the dynamic environments in which they take place. Quantification of human experience and development is encountering a growing pushback in the postmodernity. Conversely, the qualitative research paradigm offers a fresh and authentic perspective by delving into real-life biographies and encompassing the entirety of human experience. However, it is important to note that the qualitative paradigm has specific epistemological characteristics that define the scope of inquiry it generates.

Key words: qualitative research paradigm, quantitative research paradigm, purpose of education, identity formation, identity development

Introduction

Since the beginning of humankind, individuals have felt the imperative *to know thyself*, an idea that has had different meanings across eras and cultures. As Baumeister observes, in ancient times, it might have meant “to know your place and act appropriately”,¹ while today it tackles the most complex identity questions, requiring profound insight into oneself and one’s context. The world of modernity and postmodernity² is obsessed with identity perhaps more than any previous era, since its diverse, complex realities, lifestyles, orientations, and values make it difficult, if not impossible, to achieve a definitive knowledge of oneself. Development is no longer seen as a normative process with definite descriptors of attainment, as presented in earlier conceptualisations (e.g., Havighurst’s Developmental Task Theory from the 1930s). Today, identity markers and borders are more liminal than ever before.

The infatuation with identity and its many forms and facets has resulted in an abundance of different conceptualisations and theoretical positions. Despite this, at times it seems that identity is no more than a catchword, void of specific meaning and denoting almost anything, and that theories of identity have only made the discussions discourse more complicated and confusing. In the current climate we speak of identities in the plural, for they are multiple and many-layered. This results from the fact that identity is bound to one’s place in the social system, including one’s roles and attachments.³ A person has as many identities as roles in distinct social contexts,⁴ and because there are multiple social systems to which an individual might belong, there are many roles that he or she can perform.

Notwithstanding its complexity, identity plays a central role in many issues related to individuals’ psychological and social functioning. In a synthesis of other theorists’ writings, Vignoles et al.⁵ describe personal identity as the sum of a person’s goals, values and beliefs, behavioural standards and decision-making, self-esteem and self-evaluation, future selves, and overall *life story*. The centrality of self-awareness and self-definition in the notion of identity has led to the promotion

-
- 1 Roy F. Baumeister, “The Self”, in *The Handbook of Social Psychology*, Susan T. Fiske, Daniel T. Gilbert, Gardner Lindzey (eds.) (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998), pp. 680-740.
 - 2 Zygmunt Bauman, “From Pilgrim to Tourist – Or a Short History of Identity”, in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Stuart Hall, Paul du Gay (eds.) (London: SAGE, 2011), pp. 18-36.
 - 3 Roy F. Baumeister, “The Nature and Structure of the Self: An Overview”, in *The Self in Social Psychology*, Roy F. Baumeister (ed.) (Philadelphia: Psychology Press, 2011), pp. 1-20.
 - 4 Ross Macmillan, “‘Constructing Adulthood’: Agency and Subjectivity in the Transition to Adulthood” in *Constructing Adulthood: Agency and Subjectivity in Adolescence and Adulthood*, Ross Macmillan (ed.) (Oxford-Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2007), p. 14.
 - 5 Vivian L. Vignoles, Seth Schwartz and Koen Luyckx, “Introduction: Toward an Integrative View of Identity” in Seth Schwartz, Koen Luyckx and Vivian L. Vignoles (eds.). *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research* (New York: Springer, 2011), p. 3.

of identity formation and development as the main purpose of education, as viewed from an educational-humanist perspective, as opposed to an economic and utilitarian one. This makes the study of identity relevant to education as a whole. The pursuit of suitable methodologies and research paradigms for the study of identity formation and development, particularly in light of the current shifts between quantitative and qualitative paradigms, is ongoing. This article contributes by questioning the potential of qualitative methods to explore and understand the subject. It focuses on the position of theory; theoretical sampling; biographical methods; research techniques; ensuring data reliability and validity; and key elements of qualitative data analysis.

The article will first elaborate identity formation and development as the main purpose of education. It will then clarify how identity is conceptualised as opposed to the self, before revisiting the processes of identity formation and development. The main section discusses elements that need to be developed within a qualitative research approach.

Identity Formation and Development as the Main Purpose of Education

In its essence, education is a process of cultivation, in which individuals acquire specific valuable knowledge, skills and competencies for purposeful living and effective functioning in demanding social and professional domains. Recent developments in education, however, reflect a restraint from the humanistic vision of education, and conform more to economic demands; education is witnessing the entrance of business principles, which are reflected by its mission and consumerist logic in how it treats knowledge and students. The value of education to students is assessed through its capability to prepare them for the world of work, by developing their occupational identities and work readiness. Yesterday's world of work, however, is by no means similar to today's, and it is naive to expect education to thoroughly prepare graduates to confront all the complexities of tomorrow's labour market. Some views hold that consumerist orientation in education could hinder students' development:

Approaching education as something to be served and consumed encourages a hedonic, extrinsic motivation for participating (e.g., Wexler, 1992), as opposed to an intrinsic motivation based on a love of learning, self-discipline, and mastery of experience (which are essential ingredients for ego strength).⁶

6 James E. Côté, Charles G. Levine, *Identity Formation, Agency, and Culture: A Social Psychological Synthesis* (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), p. 149.

Arnold⁷ argues that the paradigm of *students' preparation* should be replaced with the paradigm of *identity formation*, suggesting that the aim of education should be to strengthen personhood and help form the identities of young people.

Educational experience can hinder or discourage the key processes in identity formation. Studies that examine the role of educational settings in the process of students' individual identity development have shown "the potency of identity as a concept at the core of educational processes",⁸ which opens space for discussing identity formation processes in various educational contexts. The literature has not, however, fully addressed how educational contexts shape the perception of identity, or contribute to its cultivation.⁹ Cooper et al.¹⁰ argue that many researchers assume youth to have unrestricted opportunities for identity exploration. In reality, as Erikson states, youth encounter both resources and challenges for identity formation in multiple contexts: individual, social, communal, and institutional. The educational context, through its structures and processes, provides a framework for students to explore their identities and ask new questions about who they are. To describe the processes of identity formation and development, it is first necessary to distinguish between the notions of self and identity.

Self and Identity

In the classical theory of identity formation, Erikson argues that identity denotes "the sense of personal sameness and historical continuity";¹¹ it is the force that enables an individual to live with purpose and orientation. According to Erikson, the seminal period for identity formation is adolescence, when an individual is faced with a conflict between identity attainment and role confusion. The process does not, however, begin in adolescence, nor does it end with it. Erikson also sees identity as "a configuration of the self that integrates a person's talents, identifications, and roles",¹² and contributes to "the individual's awareness of his

7 Rolf Arnold, *Escape from Teaching*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019).

8 Hanoeh Flum and Avi Kaplan, "Identity Formation in Educational Settings: A Contextualized View of Theory and Research in Practice", *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 37 (2012), p. 244.

9 Moin Syed and Kate C. McLean, "The Future of Identity Development Research: Reflections, Tensions, and Challenges" in Kate C. McLean and Moin Syed (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Identity Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 562-573.

10 Catherine R. Cooper, Elizabeth Gonzalez and Antoinette R. Wilson, "Identities, Cultures, and Schooling: How Students Navigate Racial-Ethnic, Indigenous, Immigrant, Social Class, and Gender Identities on Their Pathways Through School", in Kate C. McLean and Moin Syed (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Identity Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 301.

11 Erik Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: Norton, 1968), p. 17

12 Dan P. McAdams, "Narrative Identity" in Seth Schwartz, Koen Luyckx and Vivian L. Vignoles (eds.), *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research* (New York: Springer, 2011), p. 101.

or her strengths and weaknesses facilitating thus personal functioning and well-being”.¹³ In the same vein, James Marcia defined identity “as a self-structure, that is, as person’s internal representation of who he/she is in terms of life goals, attitudes, and abilities”.¹⁴ An important marker of identity formation, in addition to the previously mentioned sense of sameness and continuity, is the sense of comprehensiveness and awareness of an individual’s experiences.

In the broadest sense, the self has physical and psychological characteristics. It “exists at the interface between the physical body and the social system, including culture”,¹⁵ and consists of “reflexive consciousness, interpersonal roles and reputation, and executive function”.¹⁶ Since William James’ late nineteenth-century writings, it has been accepted that the self consists of two main parts: the “I” (the knower, active perceiver) and the “Me” (the known aspect of selfhood). The former is an “unsocial individual, a relatively uncomplicated package of needs, wants, and desires”;¹⁷ the latter is the social side, the “ability to see oneself as others see you”.¹⁸ Erikson sees the self “as an innate and natural *process* that guides one toward integrated and optimal functioning”.¹⁹ Unlike identity, which is conceived in a multiplicity of forms and dimensions, the self is seen as a single unique structure, unless a person is suffering from a pathological state.²⁰ The self is mostly biological, and is almost independent of the “Me”. At the same time, identity arises from the processes of cultivation, socialisation, upbringing and education, in which the “I” gains knowledge of thyself and takes evaluative dimensions.

Identity formation and development

The process of gaining a personal identity includes identity formation and development. In the Eriksonian tradition, identity formation starts in late adolescence, and extends until a strong adult identity is formed, commonly by committing to adult roles and tasks. Identity development continues throughout an individual’s life, reflecting changes encountered along the way via social roles,

13 Koen Luyckx, Seth Schwartz, Luc Goossens, Wim Beyers and Lies Missotten, “Processes of Personal Identity Formation and Evaluation” in Seth Schwartz, Koen Luyckx and Vivian L. Vignoles (eds.), *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research* (New York: Springer, 2011), p. 78.

14 Bart Soenens and Maarten Vansteenkiste, “When is Identity Congruent with the Self? A Self-Determination Theory Perspective” in Seth Schwartz, Koen Luyckx and Vivian L. Vignoles (eds.), *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research* (New York: Springer, 2011), p. 383.

15 Baumeister, “The Nature and Structure of the Self: An Overview”, p. 49.

16 Baumeister, “The Self”, p. 683.

17 Macmillan, “‘Constructing Adulthood’: Agency and Subjectivity in the Transition to Adulthood”, p. 13.

18 Macmillan, “‘Constructing Adulthood’: Agency and Subjectivity in the Transition to Adulthood”, p. 14.

19 Soenens and Vansteenkiste, “When Is Identity Congruent with the Self? A Self-Determination Theory Perspective”, p. 382.

20 Baumeister, “The Nature and Structure of the Self: An Overview”, p. 52.

expectations, and overall living conditions. The substance of identity, which is to be developed and formed, is the sum of self-defining characteristics, such as, abilities, attitudes, purposes, life goals and the attribution of meaning to significant life events and choices.

When the ‘identity work’ an individual undertakes is discussed in the literature, two formulations appear: identity discovery and identity construction.²¹ The latter focuses on the pragmatic value of identity processes, and culminates in the successful construction of an identity that enables an individual to function appropriately and confront challenges in various social contexts. This model denies the existence of the true self, and the substance inside a person that needs to be nurtured.²² It instead focuses on the utilitarian value of identity processes, and takes the social system as its point of reference. Unlike the construction model, identity discovery or formation focuses on identity “as a person’s internal representation of who he/she is in terms of life goals, attitudes, and abilities”.²³ It is a process of cultivating the self and discovering who one truly is.

Researching Identity Formation and Development

Limitations of the quantitative approach

In their discussion of a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods employed in identity research to date, Vignoles et al. maintain that “the differences in methodological preferences can partially account for the differences in how identity has been conceptualized across traditions”.²⁴ Because conceptualisations of identity constantly evolve, more methodological approaches are expected to emerge in the future.

A relatively well-established quantitative research line is better founded in theoretical concepts than qualitative studies, and has myriad available techniques. The shortcoming of quantitative studies, however, is that they produce aggregated results, which implies “hiding the heterogeneity of individual pathways”.²⁵ Quantitative studies commonly explore a limited number of identity

21 Alan S. Waterman, “Identity Formation: Discovery or Creation?” *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 4, (1984), pp. 329-341.

22 Soenens and Vansteenkiste, “When is Identity Congruent with the Self? A Self-Determination Theory Perspective”, pp. 381-382

23 Soenens and Vansteenkiste, “When is Identity Congruent with the Self? A Self-Determination Theory Perspective”, p. 383.

24 Vignoles, Schwartz and Luyckx, “Introduction: Toward an Integrative View of Identity”, p. 12.

25 Nicolas Robette, “The Diversity of Pathways to Adulthood in France: Evidence from a Holistic Approach”, *Advances in Life Course Research*, 15:2/3 (2010), p. 90.

dimensions, and use large samples. They follow research designs that enable precise identification of relationships between variables, such as experimental or quasi-experimental studies, and are suitable for confirmatory studies, in which variables can be controlled rigorously. According to Erikson,²⁶ such studies create clear reconstructions and prognostic formulation incongruent with the nature of identity processes. Variables are defined to enable objective measurements and uniqueness across different individuals, and reveal patterns, typologies, and expected processes in identity formation. The quantitative approach does not, however, resolve the question of whether it is possible to quantify identity while remaining true to its complex nature.

The qualitative approach

The qualitative approach maintains that there is no objective reality, and that identity is such a nuanced concept that it cannot be defined in a single methodological framework. A researcher can strive to capture identity-relevant processes as accurately as possible, but can never do so wholly. Further, qualitative studies provide openness and exploratory possibilities that expose the subjective, inner aspect of the phenomenon. In qualitative research, identities are treated mainly as discursive resources that “float free” of the individuals and groups who use them. In contrast, phenomenological approaches can be used to understand individuals’ personal, subjective experiences of their identities.²⁷ Some authors,²⁸ however, warn against the weaknesses of qualitative approaches, such as the exclusion of demographic markers, and the lack of rigor during data collection and analysis.

The Elements of a Qualitative Research Approach

The position of theory

When conveying the research, it is crucial to openly acknowledge and clarify the researcher’s familiarity with the problem. One way of achieving this is “by means of a critical discussion and appropriation of relevant theories, concepts,

26 Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1963), pp. 44–46.

27 Vignoles, Schwartz and Luyckx, “Introduction: Toward an Integrative View of Identity”, p. 12.

28 Megan Andrew, Jennifer Eggerling-Boeck, Gary D. Sandefur and Buffy Smith, “The ‘Inner Side’ of the Transition to Adulthood: How Young Adults See the Process of Becoming an Adult”, *Advances in Life Course Research* 11 (2007), p. 230.

empirical studies and other sources regarding the issue”.²⁹ To ensure the value of data obtained, it is necessary to maintain a sensitising framework throughout the research process, to utilize “elastic theoretical concepts, which are developed at the beginning of the research process and kept open during it.”³⁰

The position of theory in qualitative research is widely disputed. Some authors³¹ argue for minimal theoretical input in research design, to reduce presumptions and presuppositions in the process of data interpretation. This line of thinking maintains that qualitative research theory emerges from collected data in the form of grounded theory.³² According to the principle of openness, which is a property of qualitative studies, the main research objective is not to formulate hypotheses in advance, but to organise the research process around “relatively open theoretical concepts specifying the research question”.³³

Other authors³⁴ advocate theoretical input from the outset, to ensure “understandings of methodology and epistemological dispositions”.³⁵ This involves a reliance on the literature when defining the conceptual framework and research goals and objectives, and guiding the methodological design and data analysis procedures. An inclusive definition of the theoretical framework sees it as “any empirical or quasi-empirical theory of social and/or psychological processes, at a variety of levels (e.g., grand, midrange, explanatory), that can be applied to the understanding of the phenomena”.³⁶ How the position of theory is defined in a study is reflected in its data coding strategy, which can be theory- or data-driven, or a combination of the two.³⁷

Theoretical sampling

The concept of theoretical sampling originates from the grounded theory of Glaser and Strauss, who proposed the strategy to ensure the emergence of theory

29 Andreas Witzel and Herwig Reiter, *The Problem-Centred Interview* (London: SAGE, 2012), p. 24.

30 Witzel and Reiter, *The Problem-Centred Interview*, p. 21.

31 Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis* (London: SAGE, 2006).

32 Barney G. Glaser, *Emergence vs. Forcing: Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis* (Mill Valley: Sociology Press, 1992).

33 Witzel and Reiter, *The Problem-Centred Interview*, p. 19.

34 Sharon M. Ravitch and Nicole Mittenfelner Carl, *Qualitative Research: Bridging the Conceptual, Theoretical, and Methodological* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2016).

35 Christopher S. Collins and Carrie M. Stockton, “The Central Role of Theory in Qualitative Research”, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 17:1 (2018), p. 1.

36 Vincent A. Anfar and Norma T. Mertz, *Theoretical Frameworks in Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2015), p. 15.

37 Moin Syed and Sarah C. Nelson, “Guidelines for Establishing Reliability When Coding Narrative Data”, *Emerging Adulthood*, 3:6 (2015), p. 379.

from obtained data.³⁸ Additions to theoretical sampling define it as aiming “to develop, refine, or fill out the properties of tentative theoretical categories”.³⁹ This means that researchers start with tentative categories, and concentrate on data collection to “answer specific questions about the properties of their theoretical categories”.⁴⁰ The sample is considered complete when the researcher finds increasingly less variation in the relationship between codes, categories and the core category. At this stage, the categories, codes and emergent theory have reached ‘saturation’.⁴¹ Theoretical sampling “offers a way of designing the variation of the conditions under which a phenomenon is studied as broadly as possible”.⁴² As a result, it can cope with “the social distribution of perspectives on a phenomenon or a process”.⁴³ This further affects the criteria for defining the sample structure, which are based on theoretical knowledge of the problem, and are modified throughout the research process. Accordingly, theoretical sampling becomes congruent with focused and thematic coding. It entails inductive logics, but also includes elements of deduction in the form of tentative theoretical categories, and their testing against the data found. This process is described by Miller and Brewer as “an oscillation between induction and deduction”,⁴⁴ in which a researcher continually balances data and theory, “revising the theory by means of more data and onwards to the refinement of the theory”.⁴⁵

The biographical method

Social studies in general, and education in particular, have recently witnessed a “biographical turn”,⁴⁶ both in research and teaching practices. This has the potential to transform lives by provoking introspection and meaning-making. It gives voice to “ordinary people”, and makes them relevant social actors. Biographical elements, in addition to their personal dimension, are often linked to context, i.e., to specific circumstances in the social environment, which can be cultural, economic, or political in nature. Erikson uses the biographical method in his major theoretical works on identity formation, to analyse the life events of

38 Imelda T. Coyne, “Sampling in Qualitative Research: Purposeful and Theoretical Sampling; Merging or Clear Boundaries?”, *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 26 (1997), pp. 623-624.

39 Kathy Charmaz, “Grounded Theory: Methodology and Theory Construction”, *International Encyclopaedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (New York: Elsevier, 2015), p. 406.

40 Charmaz, “Grounded Theory: Methodology and Theory Construction”, p. 406.

41 Robert L. Miller, John D. Brewer, *The A-Z of Social Research: A Dictionary of Key Social Science Research Concepts* (London: SAGE, 2003), p. 134.

42 Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, p. 407.

43 Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, p. 308.

44 Miller and Brewer, *The A-Z of Social Research: A Dictionary of Key Social Science Research Concepts*, p. 68.

45 Miller and Brewer, *The A-Z of Social Research: A Dictionary of Key Social Science Research Concepts*, p. 68.

46 Monica McLean and Andrea Abbas, “Introduction to Biographical Methods”, *Enhancing Learning in the Social Sciences*, 3:3, (2011), pp. 1-3.

notable individuals such as Sigmund Freud, Mahatma Gandhi, Maxim Gorky, Martin Luther, and Bernard Shaw. He brings forth the *triple bookkeeping* method, which involves keeping biographical accounts of multiple developmental processes and influences in the identity formation and development processes. This strategy for navigating data collection is consistent with theoretical sampling, which will be discussed later. Participants in qualitative research are selected based on a non-statistical, purposeful strategy, which relies on the specific theoretical framework chosen.

The biographical method is a generic term, which encompasses techniques for researching an individual's biographical experience (challenges, paths and trajectories, and transitions), presented in a narrative way.⁴⁷ Here, Flick echoes Ricoeur's perspective on the mimetic relationship between life stories and narratives, noting that "[t]he narrative, in general, provides a framework in which experiences may be located, presented, and evaluated – in short, in which they are lived".⁴⁸ The concept of mimesis is used here to denote a process of framing, rather than mirroring, experiences. This is exemplified by the distinction between a life history lived by a person, and a life story told in an interview:⁴⁹ it is essential to distinguish between the chronologically ordered story in a life story interview, and the experiences and meanings exposed in a problem-centred interview (PCI). The most common biographical methods include various types of interviews and focus groups.

Qualitative research techniques

The advantage of interviews and focus groups is that they are not oblivious to the complexities and processes of identity problems. Even structured interview protocols leave room for unanticipated categories to emerge in the research process, bringing qualitative techniques closer to the "phenomenological aspects of the experience in a holistic manner and commonly from the perspective of participants themselves".⁵⁰ A variety of interview techniques can be used, but this article refers to the life story interview, the PCI and the focus group, as they have the most potential to effectively research identity formation and development processes.

47 Joanna Bornat, "Biographical Methods" in Alasuutari Pertti, Leonard Bickman and Julia Brannen (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Social Research Methods* (London: SAGE, 2008), pp. 344-356.

48 Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, p. 81.

49 Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, p. 347.

50 Jane Kroger, Monica Martinussen and James E. Marcia, "Identity Status Change during Adolescence and Young Adulthood: A Meta-Analysis", *Journal of Adolescence*, 33:5 (2010), p. 686.

The life story interview methodology is specifically directed to obtain “the story a person chooses to tell about the life he or she has lived”.⁵¹ Life stories eventually reflect *choice biographies*,⁵² which are central to understanding identity formation. According to McAdams, the life story interview assumes that people will picture their lives as a book or novel, complete with characters, themes, and high, low and turning points. Despite criticism for the use of book chapters as a metaphor for life stories, McAdams maintains that for most people in Western cultures, they are a plausible “organisational format”⁵³ to reflect upon and narrate their lives. This kind of interview assumes that the individual has “the narrative competence”⁵⁴ to tell his or her story, and effectively contribute to the data collection required for the study. Arnett demonstrates how interview data can describe subjects’ “different situations and perspectives”,⁵⁵ by provoking self-focus and self-reflection. Collected data can be presented in a way that preserves the interviews’ authenticity and individuality, while enabling the formation of typologies.

The problem-centred interview (PCI) is commonly used to collect “biographical data with regard to a certain problem”.⁵⁶ It is appropriate in research focused on “evaluations from the perspective of the moment of the interview”,⁵⁷ and “the analysis of individual reconstructions and their structuring conditions”.⁵⁸ The PCI’s application rests on the three principles:⁵⁹

1. Problem centring (orientation to the problem, which has been previously investigated and presented in the *sensitising framework*, to gain awareness of prior theories and concepts before entering into the discursive-dialogic process with research participants);
2. Process orientation (flexible production and analysis of data, a combination of inductive and deductive logic, e.g., dialectics of theoretical and practical knowledge);
3. Object-orientation (the PCI complies with the nature of the research problem, in the sense of adjusting interview questions).

51 Robert Atkinson, “The Life Story Interview”, in J.F. Gubrium and J.A. Holstein (eds.), *Handbook of Interview Research* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2002), p. 125.

52 Andy Furlong, Fred Cartmel and Andy Biggart, “Choice Biographies and Transitional Linearity: Re-Conceptualising Modern Youth Transitions”, *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona*, 79 (2006), pp. 225-239 <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/13024> [December 5, 2021].

53 Dan P. McAdams and Jane Guo, “Narrating the Generative Life”, *Psychological Science*, 26:4 (2015), p. 478.

54 Witzel and Reiter, *The Problem-Centred Interview*, p. 31.

55 Witzel and Reiter, *The Problem-Centred Interview*, p. 25.

56 Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, p. 162.

57 Elisabeth Scheibelhofer, “A Reflection Upon Interpretative Research Techniques: The Problem-Centred Interview as a Method for Biographic Research”, in Nancy Kelly et al. (eds.), *Narrative, Memory & Everyday Life* (Huddersfield: University of Huddersfield Press 2005), p. 26.

58 Scheibelhofer, “A Reflection Upon Interpretative Research Techniques: The Problem-Centred Interview as a Method for Biographic Research”, p. 27.

59 Witzel and Reiter, *The Problem-Centred Interview*.

The PCI is “designed so that the researcher’s *prior knowledge* defining and structuring the research interest in a preliminary way enters into a discursive dialogue with the respondent’s *practical everyday knowledge* about a relevant issue”.⁶⁰ In studies on identity formation and development, the PCI is centred around obtaining interpretative accounts of the developmental process an individual has undergone, including contexts, facilitators, influences, and pitfalls. It is also suitable for creating structural conditions in which the interview partners can gain experience.⁶¹ Besides integrating the self diachronically (across time dimensions), the PCI can achieve synchronic integration by combining a person’s social roles, values, and attitudes. One of its distinctive features is its dialogic-discursive practice, which reconstructs “actions and experiences, their justification and evaluation, as well as individual opinions”.⁶²

Focus groups allow for more flexible data collection, and give researchers the opportunity to inquire about dynamics that might be overlooked in a quantitative questionnaire. They are not, however, without their drawbacks. Analysing a large corpus of data gathered concurrently by several entities is challenging; the moderator may have difficulty keeping the discussion on track as members interact, with the potential for digression or a lack of clarification of opinions. Power relations in the group may be a source of coercion, causing participants to feel compelled to align themselves with positions that do not necessarily reflect their true feelings. Focus group data are based on reported attitudes and opinions that do not necessarily map directly onto, or predict, actual observed behaviour. Despite these deficiencies, data obtained from focus groups nonetheless reflect the core features of the experience shared by a particular group. Focus groups may trigger processes that reveal inner aspects of identity formation beyond objective markers and measures, and initiate dialectics between theoretical and personal conceptions.

Ensuring reliability and validity

The questions of reliability and validity are anchored differently in qualitative than quantitative research, and acquire certain features depending on the data collecting methods and techniques. It is now accepted that validity, reliability, and generalisability do not have the same “authority to legitimate the data”⁶³ when obtained in qualitative studies as they do in quantitative ones. It is therefore

60 Witzel and Reiter, *The Problem-Centred Interview*, p. 15.

61 Scheibelhofer, “A Reflection Upon Interpretative Research Techniques: The Problem-Centred Interview as a Method for Biographic Research”, p. 20.

62 Witzel and Reiter, *The Problem-Centred Interview*, p. 8.

63 Robert L. Miller and John D. Brewer, *The A-Z of Social Research: A Dictionary of Key Social Science Research Concepts* (London: SAGE, 2003), p. 101.

necessary to define precisely what the two terms mean in the former. To do so, two key issues should be determined:⁶⁴

- the genesis of the data (ensuring clear demarcation between subjects' statements and the researcher's interpretations);
- interview procedures (ensuring all steps in the process are described and documented).

Reliability can also be obtained during data analysis and interpretation, as coded segments are assessed in the context of the interview as a whole, and alongside other interviews and passages⁶⁵. This process of thematic coding allows for comparison of cases to distinguish shared and dissimilar characteristics, and such checks within and between interviews can be facilitated by qualitative data analysis software, such as *Atlas.ti*, *Maxqda* and *Nvivo*. Another strategy for maintaining data validity is for the interviewer and interviewee to revise the transcripts. This ensures authenticity and demarcation between the experiences of the narrator and researcher.

In terms of validity, the first conundrum that arises when dealing with biographical narrative techniques is ensuring that research participants are selected according to clear criteria, and that the research methods selected fit best. Validity relates to the soundness of a person's stories, and the researcher's interpretations. In qualitative research, validation is conducted by checking interpretations with participants and against data as the research evolves. Although interviews commonly include subjective constructions of events and experiences, the researcher's role is not to investigate the veracity of these accounts, but to facilitate the emergence of a personal story by not imposing preconceptions or attitudes on the interviewee. The richness and validity of the interview depend upon the degree of social biases at play in the interaction, and on the ability of participants to manage their (possibly multiple) roles.

In addition to maintaining validity and reliability, Flick⁶⁶ emphasises transparency during the research process. Witzel & Reiter⁶⁷ cite two validation strategies for the former: using the text or case as a source of control; and using the opinions of multiple interpreters as a source of control. The latter is often difficult to implement in single-researcher studies, as it involves the development of various interpretations and counter-interpretations, and their intra- and inter-textual confrontation throughout the analytical process. The authors note that "PCI is particularly suitable to being subjected to this kind of validation because of its *dialogic reconstruction of problems*".⁶⁸

64 Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, p. 387.

65 Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, p. 387.

66 Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, p. 391.

67 Witzel and Reiter, *The Problem-Centred Interview*.

68 Witzel and Reiter, *The Problem-Centred Interview*, p. 83.

In their discussion of reliability, Lincoln and Guba⁶⁹ present the concept of the *trustworthiness* of data, which has four key characteristics: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. One way to establish credibility is to include a thorough description of the entire research process. Another is to ask the same questions to different interviewees, to verify their subjective accounts against the broader context, while keeping in mind the subjective quality of the data gathered from biographical research.

It is difficult to establish the complete veracity of the accounts told by individuals, however; because they are exclusively subjective experiences, such biographical approaches are limited in terms of data credibility. Transferability is ensured by choosing interview participants from similar contexts; dependability illustrates how results are bound to the specific context; and confirmability affirms that results are based on actual data, as seen from the coding, and from authentic quotes by interviewees.

Data analysis

The essence of data analysis in qualitative research is to ensure valid interpretation, and conclusions that are founded in empirical findings. To this end, the researcher faces the challenge of understanding participants' referential frameworks, which form their experiences and unique perspectives on life as authentically as possible. The researcher should prioritise the "participant's subjective consciousness",⁷⁰ thereby evoking the meaning-making process and reflexive knowledge production. The data analysis and interpretation process should therefore take into account the subjectivity, authenticity and reflexivity of the material obtained from participants.

Data analysis can be performed in three parts. The first is the data collection process, in which interviews are transcribed and notes are taken, to saturate the study with information and centre the process on the research questions. The second part applies data analysis methods, and produces initial research findings, and the third involves revision of the findings, and the achievement of internal data coherence. There are three major data analysis methods: thematic analysis, type-building, and concept mapping. Figure 1 illustrates how these methods interact, with the results of one method leading to the next. Integration and internal coherence between sets of research results can be accomplished in this way.

69 Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Newbury Park: SAGE, 1985).

70 Magdalena Suárez-Ortega, "Performance, Reflexivity, and Learning through Biographical-Narrative Research", *Qualitative Inquiry*, 19:3 (2012), p. 191.

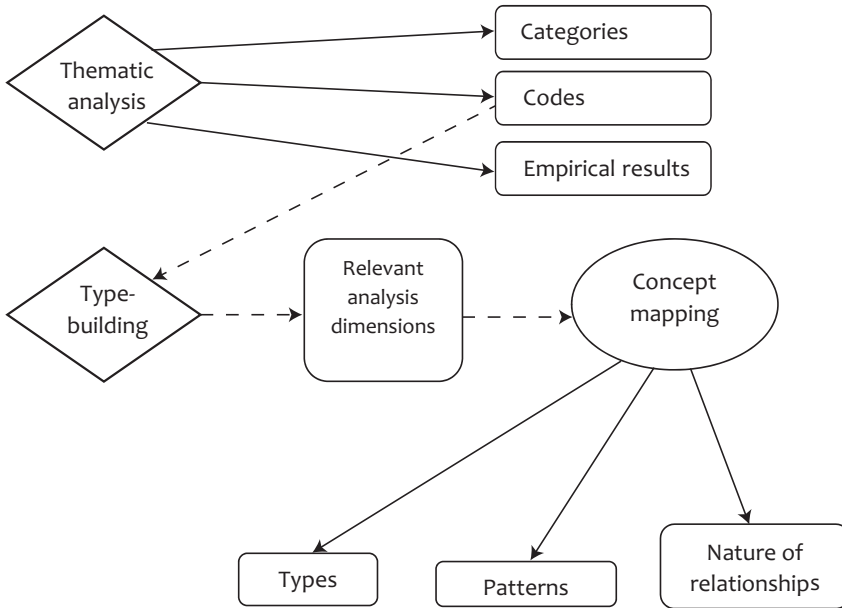


Figure 1: The relationship between qualitative data analysis methods⁷¹

Analysis begins with the thematic scrutiny of transcripts, to identify relevant passages. At this stage, larger interview segments are extracted, before being reduced and organised into categories and sub-categories in subsequent stages. Categories are first deductively derived from existing themes in theory and research, while the sub-codes are extracted inductively from the interviews. Category-based analysis provides answers to the descriptive sets of questions⁷² asked about the phenomena, their properties and components, and how they can be categorised.

Concept mapping is a visualisation of the interconnectedness of the concepts in the empirical material. It is applicable as a method of both data collection and data analysis⁷³, and in the latter, it enables synthesis, organisation and the identification of relationships between concepts.⁷⁴ Because it locates cognate data sets and ensures comparability between codes and categories, it is compatible with both theoretical sampling and thematic analysis. Concept mapping starts with the identification of a core concept (e.g., an assessment of the identity formation process), to which other concepts are joined based on identified relationships.

71 Source: the author's own presentation.

72 Julian Meltzoff, *Critical Thinking about Research: Psychology and Related Fields*, (Washington: APA, 1999).

73 David L. Morgan and Heather Guevara, "Concept Mapping" in Lisa M. Given (ed.), *The SAGE encyclopaedia of qualitative research methods* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2008), pp. 108-109.

74 Simone Conceicao, Anita Samuel and Susan Yelich Binięcki, "Using Concept Mapping as a Tool for Conducting Research: An Analysis of Three Approaches", *Cogent Social Sciences*, 3:1 (2017), pp. 1-18.

For the sake of data transferability, codes are first *dimensionalised*,⁷⁵ and relations between them are coded and presented in the matrix. The analysis of *meaningful relationships* is first based on participants' own comments about the links they identified that led to the development of their current identity. Those comments are later analysed across different cases to find *properties* and *dimensions*,⁷⁶ which are then used for the comparison of cases, and eventually type-building. In identifying relationships between factors, the principle of *triple book keeping* is implemented, in the sense that the analysis of relationships simultaneously tracks the occurrence of various factors and iterative processes. Through concept mapping, it is possible to create linkages between identity-forming factors.

At this stage, *meaningful relations* that form combinations of attributes are created, which paves the way to type-building. This set of questions identifies types and describes relationships between identity forming factors. Type-building as a strategy of data analysis provides “multi-dimensional patterns and models that enable researchers understand a complex subject or field”.⁷⁷ It obtains knowledge of typical manifestations, and is often referred to in the literature⁷⁸ as the qualitative counterpart of generalisations that characterise quantitative studies. It is argued that generalisation in qualitative research is achieved through “the gradual transfer of findings from case studies and their context to more general and abstract relations, for example a typology”.⁷⁹ Kuckartz⁸⁰ goes as far as to assume that the main goal of social science research is to understand what is typical.

Conclusions

After reviewing the key features of the qualitative paradigm in researching identity formation and development, we can infer that qualitative studies do not formulate generalisations, but are rather concerned with understanding the individual circumstances of identity formation and development. The biographical method employs a range of research techniques to deal with biographical material, such as the lived experiences of individuals, their interpretations of life events, and the process of meaning-making. It is specifically applicable in newly evolving

75 Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2018).

76 Corbin and Strauss, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*.

77 Udo Kuckartz, *Qualitative Text Analysis: A Guide to Methods, Practices & Using Software* (London: SAGE, 2014), p. 103.

78 Kuckartz, *Qualitative Text Analysis: A Guide to Methods, Practices & Using Software*, p. 68.

79 Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, p. 408.

80 Kuckartz, *Qualitative Text Analysis: A Guide to Methods, Practices & Using Software*, p. 105.

identity domains, where concepts and processes are not yet fully operationalised and where multiple influences are at work. Viewing quantitative and qualitative studies in the context of ego identity formation, Kroger concludes that the latter are more frequent “alongside other, more varied, dimensions of identity”,⁸¹ which are yet to be explored and fully described. In ensuring the validity and reliability of data collected and analysed via the qualitative methodology, it is crucial to describe the strategy of selecting participants, establishing relationships between the interviewer and interviewees, and ensuring participants’ reflexivity and deliberation for the soundness of data.

As discussed, a variety of individual and group interview types can be used in the study of identity processes. The PCI evokes elaborate narrations, especially since interviewees often express uncertainty and the need to provide additional explanation when talking about their own developmental processes. This might compromise the validity of results in the quantitative method, but gives qualitative research an emancipatory and awareness-raising dimension. The PCI allows the focus to remain on the topic of identity formation, and to maintain *planned openness* when conducting interviews. Such methodological tools do not, however, allow for rigorous variable control or correlation analysis.

Qualitative thematic analysis enables the preservation of interviewees’ individuality, and opens the way to comparing and contrasting characteristics of participants, to identify regularities and patterns. The process of data analysis becomes an epistemological journey that questions the researcher’s prior theoretical and intuitive knowledge, to feed existing conceptions with empirically-based results. This affects the nature of the knowledge gained, as starting sensitising concepts are “loosely defined, general concepts, rather than those that have specific, precise definitions”.⁸² The obtained results can be formulated so as to illustrate patterns and regularities bound to the context of the research, but their actual value to the wider population should be complemented with large-scale research projects that yield more controlled insights into the developmental process, such as longitudinal or cross-sectional studies.

Further limitations stem from the theoretical sampling strategy, and the selection of participants based on pre-assumed fit to the research intention. Sometimes participants’ personal biases cannot be controlled, and researchers may favour certain individuals over others. Consequently, the qualitative results speak only for a relatively small and highly selective research sample, and disadvantaged groups tend to be out of reach. Interviewing individuals using qualitative analysis

81 Jane Kroger, “Identity Development in Adolescence and Adulthood”, <https://oxfordre.com/psychology/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190236557.001.0001/acrefore-9780190236557-e-54>, accessed 30 October 2021.

82 Charmaz, “Grounded Theory: Methodology and Theory Construction”, p. 405.

methods also results in voluminous empirical material, which can be difficult to handle in all its subtleties. Here, rationalisations through categorisation or typification – while giving order and meaning to the empirical material – may reduce the incidence of elements that do not fit to the overall pattern. In smaller research samples, it may be possible to address the minutiae, and even to analyse the detailed adult identity formation factors in each participant. In such cases, however, the inclusion of individuals from diverse backgrounds is less likely to be achieved in a balanced way.

By using type-building and concept mapping for data analysis, it is possible to group similar cases according to the manifestation of identity-forming factors, and the relationships between them. These relationships can be reconstructed on the basis of personal narrations, and the relevance individuals assign to certain events. Because self-assessments necessarily contain subjective biases, and tendencies to over- or underestimate particular factors, it is methodologically justifiable to include mixed-method data collection, to ensure more accurate assessments of developmental paths and influences.

Based on the results of this article, it can be concluded that the epistemological value of the qualitative paradigm in identity formation and development research is in its multidimensionality, orientation to the meaning-making process, and preservation of the uniqueness of data. If appropriate data collection and analysis procedures are employed, the value of the obtained data transgresses subjective meanings, making it applicable to the wider context of human life.

Bibliography

- Andrew, Megan, Jennifer Eggerling-Boeck, Gary D. Sandefur and Buffy Smith, “The ‘Inner Side’ of the Transition to Adulthood: How Young Adults See the Process of Becoming an Adult”, *Advances in Life Course Research*, 11 (2007), pp. 225-251.
- Anfara, Vincent A. and Norma T. Mertz, *Theoretical Frameworks in Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2015).
- Atkinson, Robert, “The Life Story Interview”, in J.F. Gubrium and J.A. Holstein (eds.). *Handbook of Interview Research* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2002), pp. 121-140.
- Baumeister, Roy F., “The Self”, in *The Handbook of Social Psychology*, Susan T. Fiske, Daniel

- T. Gilbert and Gardner Lindzey (eds.) (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998), pp. 680-740.
- Baumeister, Roy F., "The Nature and Structure of the Self: An Overview", in *The Self in Social Psychology*, Roy F. Baumeister (ed.) (Philadelphia: Psychology Press, 2011), pp. 1-20.
- Bauman, Zygmunt, "From Pilgrim to Tourist – Or a Short History of Identity", in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (eds.) (London: SAGE, 2011), pp. 18-36.
- Bornat, Joanna, "Biographical Methods" in Alasuutari Pertti, Leonard Bickman and Julia Brannen (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Social Research Methods* (London: SAGE, 2008), pp. 344-356.
- Charmaz, Kathy, "Grounded Theory: Methodology and Theory Construction", *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (New York: Elsevier, 2015), pp. 402-407.
- Charmaz, Kathy, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis* (London: SAGE, 2006).
- Collins, Christopher S., and Carrie M. Stockton, "The Central Role of Theory in Qualitative Research", *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 17:1, (2018), pp. 1-10.
- Conceicao, Simone, Anita Samuel, and Susan Yelich Biniecki, "Using Concept Mapping as a Tool for Conducting Research: An Analysis of Three Approaches", *Cogent Social Sciences*, 3:1 (2017), pp. 1-18.
- Cooper, Catherine R., Elizabeth Gonzalez and Antoinette R. Wilson, "Identities, Cultures, and Schooling: How Students Navigate Racial-Ethnic, Indigenous, Immigrant, Social Class, and Gender Identities on Their Pathways Through School", in Kate C. McLean and Moin Syed (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Identity Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 299-318.
- Corbin, Juliet and Anselm Strauss, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2018).
- James E. and Charles G. Levine, *Identity Formation, Agency, and Culture: A Social Psychological Synthesis* (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002).
- Coyne, Imelda T., "Sampling in Qualitative Research: Purposeful and Theoretical Sampling; Merging or Clear Boundaries?", *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 26 (1997), pp. 623-630.
- Erikson, Erik, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: Norton, 1968).
- Erikson, Erik, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1963).
- Flick, Uwe, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. (London: SAGE, 2009).

- Flum, Hanoch, Kaplan, Avi, "Identity Formation in Educational Settings: A Contextualized View of Theory and Research in Practice", *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 37 (2012), pp. 240-245.
- Furlong, Andy, Fred Cartmel and Andy Biggart, "Choice Biographies and Transitional Linearity: Re-Conceptualising Modern Youth Transitions", *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Papers* 79 (2006), pp. 225-239.
- Glaser, Barney G., *Emergence vs. Forcing: Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis* (Mill Valley: Sociology Press, 1992).
- Kroger, Jane, "Identity Development in Adolescence and Adulthood", <https://oxfordre.com/psychology/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190236557.001.0001/acrefore-9780190236557-e-54>, accessed 30 October 30 2021.
- Kroger, Jane, Monica Martinussen, and James E. Marcia, "Identity Status Change during Adolescence and Young Adulthood: A Meta-Analysis", *Journal of Adolescence*, 33:5 (2010), pp. 683-698.
- Kuckartz, Udo, *Qualitative Text Analysis: A Guide to Methods, Practices and Using Software* (London: SAGE, 2014).
- Lincoln, Yvonna S. and Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Newbury Park: SAGE, 1985).
- Luyckx, Koen, Schwartz, Seith, Goossens, Luc, Beyers, Wim, Missotten, Lies, "Processes of Personal Identity Formation and Evaluation" in Seth Schwartz, Koen Luyckx, Vivian L. Vignoles (eds.). *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research* (New York-Dordrecht-Heidelberg-London; Springer, 2011), pp. 77-98.
- McAdams, Dan P., "Narrative Identity" in Seth Schwartz, Koen Luyckx, Vivian L. Vignoles (eds.). *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research* (New York: Springer, 2011), pp. 99-116.
- McAdams, Dan P., Guo, Jane, "Narrating the Generative Life", *Psychological Science*, 26:4 (2015), pp. 475-483.
- McLean, Monica and Andrea Abbas, "Introduction to Biographical Methods", *Enhancing Learning in the Social Sciences*, 3:3 (2011), pp. 1-3.
- Meltzoff, Julian, *Critical Thinking about Research: Psychology and Related Fields*, (Washington: APA, 1999).
- Miller, Robert L. *Researching Life Stories and Family Histories* (London: SAGE, 2000).
- Miller, Robert L., and John D. Brewer, *The A-Z of Social Research: A Dictionary of Key Social Science Research Concepts* (London: SAGE, 2003).
- Morgan, David L., and Heather Guevara, "Concept Mapping" in Lisa M. Given (ed.), *The SAGE Encyclopaedia of Qualitative Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2008), pp. 108-109.

- Ravitch, Sharon M., and Nicole Mittenfelner Carl, *Qualitative Research: Bridging the Conceptual, Theoretical, and Methodological* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2016).
- Robette, Nicolas, "The Diversity of Pathways to Adulthood in France: Evidence from a Holistic Approach", *Advances in Life Course Research*, 15:2/3 (2010), pp. 89-96.
- Ross, Macmillan, " 'Constructing Adulthood': Agency and Subjectivity in the Transition to Adulthood" in *Constructing Adulthood: Agency and Subjectivity in Adolescence and Adulthood*, Ross Macmillan (ed.) (Oxford: Elsevier, 2007), pp. 3-29.
- Scheibelhofer, Elisabeth, "A Reflection Upon Interpretative Research Techniques: The Problem-Centred Interview as a Method for Biographic Research" in Nancy Kelly et al. (eds.), *Narrative, Memory & Everyday Life* (Huddersfield: University of Huddersfield Press, 2005), pp. 19-32.
- Schwartz, Seth J., Byron L. Zamboanga, Koen Luyckx, Alan Meca and Rachel Ritchie, "Identity in Emerging Adulthood: Reviewing the Field and Looking Forward", *Emerging Adulthood*, 1:2 (2013), pp. 96-113.
- Soenens, Bart and Maarten Vansteenkiste, "When Is Identity Congruent with the Self? A Self-Determination Theory Perspective" in Seth Schwartz, Koen Luyckx and Vivian L. Vignoles (eds.), *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research* (New York: Springer, 2011), pp. 381-402.
- Suarez-Ortega, Magdalena, "Performance, Reflexivity, and Learning through Biographical-Narrative Research", *Qualitative Inquiry*, 19:3 (2012), pp. 189-200.
- Syed, Moin and Sarah C. Nelson, "Guidelines for Establishing Reliability When Coding Narrative Data", *Emerging Adulthood*, 3:6 (2015), pp. 375-387.
- Syed, Moin and Kate McLean, "The Future of Identity Development Research: Reflections, Tensions, and Challenges", in Kate C. McLean and Moin Syed (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Identity Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 562-573.
- Waterman, Alan S., "Identity Formation: Discovery or Creation?" *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 4 (1984), pp. 329-341.
- Witzel, Andreas and Herwig Reiter, *The Problem-Centred Interview* (London: SAGE, 2012).
- Vignoles, Vivian L., Seth Schwartz, and Koen Luyckx, "Introduction: Toward an Integrative View of Identity" in Seth Schwartz, Koen Luyckx and Vivian L. Vignoles (eds.), *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research* (New York: Springer, 2011), pp. 1-30.

Dalje od kvantitativnih mjerenja: Istraživanje formiranja i razvoja identiteta kroz kvalitativnu paradigmu

Sažetak

Glavni cilj ovog rada je analizirati potencijal kvalitativne istraživačke paradigme u pristupu kompleksnim temama formiranja i razvoja identiteta. Pitanje identiteta je u srcu novijih konceptualizacija svrhe obrazovanja, pri čemu autori argumentiraju značaj paradigme *formiranja identiteta* (umjesto *paradigme pripreme*). Ovo implicira da cilj obrazovanja treba biti jačanje ličnosti i oblikovanje ličnih identiteta mladih osoba, budući da je zahtjeve budućnosti teško predvidjeti i za njih se pripremiti. Istraživanja u području obrazovanja približavaju se tački u kojoj kvantitativne studije temeljene na statističkim podacima nisu u mogućnosti donijeti vrijedno znanje o sve raznolikijim putanjama ljudskog razvoja i dinamičnim okruženjima u kojima se on događa. Kvantifikacija ljudskog iskustva i razvoja nailazi na sve veći otpor u postmodernom dobu. S druge strane, kvalitativna istraživačka paradigma, dok navodno pruža nov i autentičan pogled na stvarne biografije i cjelinu ljudskog iskustva, ima specifične epistemološke karakteristike koje definiraju domete i ograničenja istraživanja koje generira.

Ključne riječi: kvalitativna istraživačka paradigma, kvantitativna istraživačka paradigma, svrha obrazovanja, formiranje identiteta, razvoj identiteta