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Mapping qualitative research in psychology across five Central-Eastern European countries: Contemporary trends: A paradigm analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study describes the current state of qualitative psychology and gives an overview of the philosophical paradigms used in English language qualitative psychology studies from the post-socialist countries of Central Eastern Europe. For political and historical reasons, academic life of this area is unique, providing a special field for investigation. This study explored the following research questions: Which philosophical paradigms are used in qualitative psychology? What kind of methods are applied? What kind of fields in psychology are examined? Thirty-five articles were analysed from five countries. Articles were examined through their paradigmatic considerations, using a dichotomous qualitative quasi-testing to distinguish positivist/postpositivist from interpretive/constructivist paradigms. We examined the methodology and content of various articles and analysed the keywords to explore common themes of interest. A dominant constructivist philosophical approach was present. Pure positivist articles were found to be quite rare, but mixed paradigms seemed to be frequent. Most of the methodologies were not specified. In terms of interest, the most commonly examined field was found to be social psychology. In the post-socialist era, mixed paradigms were conspicuous since culture and tradition might have had a significant effect on ontology, epistemology, and knowledge of the researcher.

KEYWORDS

postsocialist; Central Eastern Europe; qualitative mapping; qualitative methods; qualitative trends; paradigm; postpositivism; constructivism; content analysis

Introduction

Rationale

The aim of this study was to assess the status of qualitative psychology in the academic life of Central-Eastern Europe. The common political and historical background of these countries made the evaluation of academic life in Central-Eastern European different from the one of the “Western World”¹ (Tímár 2004; Stenning & Hörschelmann 2008), thereby providing a special field for investigation. This study aims for a comprehensive understanding of the modern trends of qualitative psychology in Central-Eastern Europe. We

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examined five countries of the area with the most similar socio-cultural background among Central-Eastern European countries. They gained their scientific foundation under the successful educational system of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (Buklijas & Lafferton 2007) and later under the influence of the Soviet Union.

Our particular focus was on the presence and state of psychological qualitative research in the scientific life of five Central-Eastern European postsocialist countries (Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Poland, and Romania). Our aim was to analyse the current articles, which were written after the countries had joined the European Union (Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, and Slovakia in 2004; Romania in 2007), since the Europeanization might have had effects on the scientific trends. We focused on the paradigmatic considerations under which studies are completed. As we had not yet found any regional surveys on this field, we aimed to provide support for such research in psychology.

Psychology in Central-Eastern Europe

After World War II, during communist and socialist periods, the selected countries were under the influence of the Soviet Union. The Communist regime was efficient in maintaining control over the collective memory and social discourse (Gille 2010). Academic life became a target of the ideological clearings and the “bolshevization” of science, which meant the subordination and prohibition of “Western” psychology (Szokolszky 2016; Kovai 2016). This led to the prohibition of psychoanalysis, the Gestalt approach in psychology (Wertz 2014). Instead of following Western science, a so-called “pavlovization” took place based on the theories of the famous Russian scientist Ivan Pavlov. This led to the medicalization of psychology, which actually saved it from becoming the part of the ideological movement. Other less clinical medical fields of psychology were prohibited. In the 1960s, the political regime weakened and psychology became “tolerated” (Szokolszky 2016). In 1967, the Transnational Committee established the first conference in Vienna where Eastern and Western social scientists could meet. However, the discussion of philosophical and ideological considerations was excluded from the meetings (Moscovici & Marková 2006). In 1968, the crisis in Prague and later the student revolution at many Western European and American universities challenged the cooperation of the two “worlds.” Socialist countries were excluded from the ballooning internationalization of Western psychology (Danziger 2006).

The change of regime in 1989 caused a political and economic shift in Central-Eastern Europe. It resulted in a complex situation in the context of the contracting world economy. Because of the rapid change of ideologies, politics, economics, and society, this area became a special laboratory for

social (Schwartz, Bardi & Bianchi 2000), economic, and political investigations (Stanilov 2007). However, politicians of the fallen regime managed to transform their political influence into economic values, enabling them to keep their influence and power in the new system. Ex-communist professionals were kept in politics because there was no one to replace them (Bunce & Csanádi 2015). The singularity is caused by the peculiarities of the fallen regime, with politics having effects on family norms and individual preferences (Robila & Krishnakumar 2004) as well as values and priorities (Schwartz, Bardi & Bianchi 2000), leading to a long-standing change that affected forthcoming generations (Alesina & Fuchs-Schündeln 2007). This influence had a deep-rooted effect on the concept of trust and honesty (Rose-Ackerman 2001), thus establishing a political-geographical-social postsocialist condition (Gille 2010). As psychology science and practice were considered suspicious in the eyes of the regime, psychology had a different history, traditions, and evaluation than its “Western” counterpart.

Qualitative research trends

Qualitative research has received much more attention in the past 25 years (Rennie, Watson & Monteiro 2000). Numerous studies have been implemented to monitor trends in qualitative methods (e.g., Sexton 1996; Ponterotto 2010; O’Neill 2002). These studies claimed to detect an increasing presence of qualitative psychology research, especially in the fields of counseling (Berríos & Lucca 2006) and health psychology (Davidsen 2013), albeit the increasing qualitative interest is present in most psychological fields (Stainton-Rogers & Willig 2017).

Qualitative psychological studies are based on different philosophical approaches of reality and epistemology (Guba & Lincoln 1994, 1982). This results in diverse methodological choices and even multiple variations of a single method. In other words, there are no “standard methods.” Different methods and approaches might lead to several interpretations and diverse knowledge (Gale 1993). For this reason, Morrow (2005) emphasizes the importance of self-reflexivity and indicates the necessity of the researchers’ ability to explain the used paradigms clearly, in addition to making the research transparent (Morrow & Smith 2000).

Transparency means the clear explanation of the study’s purpose (Morrow 2005; Guba & Lincoln 1994), goals, methods, and procedures (Elliott, Fischer & Rennie 1999). These are embedded in the researcher’s perspective and basic belief system (Gehart, Ratliff & Lyle 2001). These beliefs might be presented in a philosophical frame alias paradigmatic knowledge (Morrow 2005; Guba & Lincoln 1994; Gehart, Ratliff & Lyle 2001; Ponterotto 2005). In some qualitative studies, transparency might be missing, leading to the distortion of the results (Ponterotto 2010). Therefore, paradigms are

established to gain some standards to help make qualitative research easy to evaluate (Guba & Lincoln 1989).

Qualitative psychology in Europe

Marecek et al. (1997) state that qualitative research blossomed in Europe as European psychologists became more familiar with philosophies that supported new methodologies (Wertz 2014). However, qualitative research is still considered to be secondary in psychological research in Europe (Symon & Cassel 2016). The author's representation of Europe seems to be based on Western European countries, such as the United Kingdom, Germany, and France. Other parts of Europe, such as Central-Eastern Europe, received little attention. Steps were made to improve the usage of qualitative methods; for example, the Centre for Qualitative Psychology was founded in 1999 in Tübingen, Germany, and held an annual meeting in Europe and in Israel. Some articles (Angermüller 2005; Konecki 2005; Bruni & Gobo 2005) were written (mainly on sociology) on comparing European and American qualitative research, but they focused only on Western European countries. Wertz (2014) considered qualitative psychology as causing the reblossoming of humanistic psychology, which had deep roots in Europe.

According to previous findings, common topics of qualitative research in the “Western World”¹ are social issues, gender, ethnicity (Marchel & Owens 2007), and sexual identity (Peel, Clarke & Drescher 2007). Common fields include education, cultural psychology (Swartz & Rohleder 2017), counseling (Marchel & Owens 2007), and drug abuse (Olsen et al. 2015). However, qualitative studies seem to appear in every field of psychology (Stainton-Rogers & Willig 2017).

Paradigm shift, blurring paradigms

Leading researchers categorize qualitative studies into four main philosophical paradigms: positivism, postpositivism, critical theory, and constructivism (Guba & Lincoln 1994; Lincoln, Lynham & Guba 2011; Patton 2002; Rossman & Rallis 2003; Gehart, Ratliff & Lyle 2001), supplemented with their combinations (Ponterotto, Park-Taylor & Chen 2017). The characteristics of the four paradigms, according to Guba and Lincoln (1984), are 1) The positivist paradigm is mainly used in hard science; it is focused on the examination of one objective reality, uses deductive, manipulative, and mainly quantitative methods. 2) Postpositivism states there is one “real” reality, but it is imperfectly understood. It is objectivist and the methodology concentrates on hypothesis falsification. 3) Critical theory states virtual reality is influenced and shaped by social, cultural, political, economic, ethnic, and gender evaluations, so subjective interpretations can be

examined. 4) Constructionism claims reality is constructed due to local, individual and specific influences and contexts, and thus parallel realities might exist. It focuses on subjective interpretations.

Ponterotto (2005) claims simultaneous usage of different paradigms might occur in one study. He primarily examined international journals (mainly North American) and found that positivism continued to be the primary concept in psychological research, although the prevalence of constructionist views had been increasing since 1995. Between 2013 and 2015, an increase was detected in the number of constructivist/interpretivist studies (Ponterotto, Park-Taylor & Chen 2017).

Having considered the theoretical background and fields of qualitative research, we reached three explorative research questions:

- (1) Which philosophical paradigms are used dominantly in psychological research in Central-Eastern Europe?
- (2) Which methods are frequently used and under what considerations?
- (3) Which fields of psychology are usually examined with qualitative approaches?

Methods

Data collection

The selection criteria of the articles were that one of the authors had to belong to one of the universities of the above-mentioned countries (e.g., Krahé et al. 2015). First-authorship was not obligatory. Studies available on scientific databases were not categorized by the universities, countries, or nationalities of the authors. This led us to three data collection methods:

- (1) We searched the EBSCO host, ResearchGate, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. We searched by country name or author nationality and used some of the keywords used by Rennie, Watson and Monteiro (2002). These were “qualitative” “qualitative psychology” “qualitative analysis,” “qualitative research,” “phenomenology,” “discursive psychology,” “content analysis,” and “case study.” Thirty-nine articles were found this way.
- (2) On SCImago Journal, we searched for English-language psychological journals of the above-mentioned countries publishing qualitative articles of national authors: the Slovakian *Studia Psychologica*, the Polish *Psychological Bulletin*, the Romanian *Journal of Applied Psychology*, the Czech *Cyberpsychology*, and the Hungarian *European Journal of Mental Health*. As most of the journals were operating on an international-level, it was difficult to find articles for our goals. In some cases we found psychology journals such as *Ceskoslovenska psychologie*, but we could not

reach whole texts of English language articles. Twenty-five national qualitative articles were found that met the inclusion criteria.

- (3) We collected the e-mail addresses of all psychology institutions, associations, and universities in the target geographic area based on the list of psychology-resources.org. We sent 46 e-mails asking for information about qualitative education, research, and publications. We received 16 answers with 18 articles and 8 lists of publications.

The study included 82 English language articles in total from which we analyzed 35, the most current 7 by each country. The earliest article was published in 2005 and the most recent one in 2018. The smallest number of articles (seven) was found in the group of Romanian qualitative researchers. To have a balanced sample, the seven most recent articles from each country were analyzed.

Data analysis

This study is not a meta-analysis since it is not collecting and reanalysing the relevant empirical literature. Neither could our research be called a systematic review because we did not want to collect evidence to answer a research question. Our research focused on the manifest content of texts: their philosophical considerations. That is why we created the phrase “paradigm analysis,” similarly to Chandler’s paradigmatic analysis in linguistics (1994).

Deductive content analysis — first research question

A theory-driven deductive content analysis was carried out (Elo & Kyngäs 2008; Hsieh & Shannon 2005). Due to clarity and simplicity issues, the categories of our content analysis were based on a two-paradigm system introduced by Petty, Thomson and Stew (2012, p. 269). In this system, the two main paradigms are positivism/postpositivism and interpretivism/constructivism. We added the category of modes of representation and type of research phenomenon from Harré’s (2004) distinction between the philosophical perspectives of natural science and human science. The deductive content analysis was based on our criteria system with opposing aspects. The coding system is presented in Table 1.

The coding process was the following: The first author read the articles and took notes on the description and usage of the qualitative approach. Then the second and third authors tested the categorization. Discrepancies were discussed and a consensus was reached. We classified the articles into the following five categories: 1) interpretivist/constructivist, 2) positivist/postpositivist (mixed methods, quantifying qualitative approach), 3) mixed paradigms with postpositivist dominance, 4) mixed paradigms with constructionist dominance, and 5) cannot be clearly identified.

Table 1. Deductive paradigm analysis of the examined articles.

| | Postpositivism | Interpretivism/constructivism |
|------------------------|--|--|
| Ontology | One objective reality | Multiple realities |
| Epistemology | Absolutist | Relativist |
| Knowledge | Objective, direct, theory-driven, hypothesis-focused | Subjective, nondirect, data-driven, interpretative |
| Phenomenon | Material | Human/intentional |
| Mode of representation | Metrically | Discursively |
| Method of analysis | Deductive | Inductive |
| Generalizability | Generalize | Descriptive level |
| Research question | Defined (narrow, fix) | Flexible (broad) |
| Researcher's attitude | Neutrality (passive) | Involved (active) |
| Participant's attitude | Passive | Active |
| Variables | Defined and controlled | Undefined and non-controlled |
| Results language | Scientific | Lay (quotations) |
| Reliability | Reproducibility, replication | Not relevant, not needed |

We classified the articles by the detachment between the first and second broad categories first. Then according to the complexity of previously used paradigms, we created the third, fourth, and fifth dimensions. We divided the articles into the most suitable categories, with the sensibility to the dominantly used paradigms (third and fourth categories). Those which used elements and considerations simultaneously from both paradigms more than two times or were problematic to be categorized were put into the fifth “cannot be clearly identified” category. On some occasions, it was difficult to categorize an article because little information was given about the data analysis (e.g., Adamczyk 2016). In these instances, we used the context to form conclusions as they seemed to use a kind of content analysis, but research questions were hypotheses. There was no reflection on whether the research used inductive or deductive coding systems. In such cases, we put a question mark in the categorization table. This way we found more than three problematic categories, so we put the questionable article into the fifth category (cannot be classified).

Analysis of methods — second research question

Cited methodologies and references were collected from the articles following the research method of Marchel and Owens (2007). We put them into inductive categories according to which method was stated to be used in the study. Table 2 depicts some examples from the reviewed articles which led us to the conclusion of categorizations.

Content analysis — third research question

The third focus of our study was to explore the topics of the examined articles. We collected the keywords of the articles or used the words of the

Table 2. Examples for the usage of our deductive paradigm analysis table.

| | Postpositivism | Interpretivism/constructivism |
|------------------------|--|---|
| Ontology | <i>One objective reality</i> Investigating objective materialistic phenomenon such as wages. (Surugiu 2013) <i>Absolutist</i> | <i>Multiple realities</i> "...story telling reflects the way in which our experience is structured and our understanding of the world and ourselves within it is constructed." (Chrz, Cermák & Chrzová 2009) |
| Epistemology | "Analysing and interpreting the results, the author decided to use Ainsworth's tripartite concept of attachment styles" (Adamczyk 2016) | "If we as researchers want to learn something about the experience of being a parent of a physically disabled child, we may focus on the way such experience is structured through narration." (Chrz, Cermák, & Chrzová 2009) |
| Knowledge | When direct, theory driven hypothesis was used e.g., "The majority of the studied adolescents will display insecure attachment styles, determined on the basis of documents analysis, observation and interviews." (Adamczyk 2016) | Subjective, inductive, data driven: "the second reading: analysis and interpretation of conversations through the categories applied the third reading: an attempt to capture the experience of the individual parents in its completeness." (Chrz et al. 2009) |
| Phenomenon | Material wages, salary. (Surugiu 2013) | Human/intentional "The second purpose was to examine the similarities and differences between peer helpers and fellow helpers: considering how they might differ in the process of becoming a helper, in their practices of helping, and in the personal relationships involved in delivering help." (Rącz & Kaló 2007) |
| Mode of representation | Metrically (Surugiu 2013) | Discursively – quotations. (Pietkiewicz, & Skowrońska-Włoch 2017) |
| Method of analysis | Deductive "The content of interviews was coded using a coding frame..." (Rącz, Csák, & Lisznyai 2015) | Inductive "We first analysed all transcripts and produced a master list of emerging themes. This master list was gradually enriched in an iterative process." (Pavlova, Uher & Papezova 2008) |
| Generalizability | Generalize "Young people with anxious-ambivalent attachment style are characterised by low self-esteem..." (Adamczyk 2016) | Descriptive level "Thus, despite the reasonably large sample for a qualitative study, it was impossible to make generalizations..." (Kelmendi 2015) |

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued).

| | Postpositivism | Interpretivism/constructivism |
|------------------------|---|--|
| Research question | Defined (narrow, fix) "Deficits observed in emotional, behavioural and social sphere can be associated with early childhood disorders of attachment relationships." (Adamczyk 2016) | Flexible (broad) "What aspects of such life events are functional in triggering the onset or deterioration of the disorder?" (Pavlova et al. 2008) |
| Researcher's attitude | Neutrality (passive) Analysis of Journals (Bianchi & Fúsková 2015) | Involved (active) Interview (Takács et al. 2013) |
| Participant's attitude | Passive Questionnaires, participant observations. | Active The semi-structured, face-to-face interviews followed the pattern of McAdams' (1993) life story interviews with a focus on the participants' peer helping involvement and experiences. (Rácz & Kaló 2007) |
| Variables | Defined and controlled Frequencies were examined and used. (Bianchi, & Fúsková 2015) | Undefined and non-controlled "It involved search across the data set to find repeated patterns of meaning." (Pietkiewicz & Skowrońska-Włoch 2017) |
| Results language | Scientific metrical, statistical. (Bianchi, & Fúsková 2015) | Lay (quotations). (Pietkiewicz & Skowrońska-Włoch 2017) |
| Reliability | Reproducibility, replication "... in-depth interview should be replaced by standardized qualitative methods." (Adamczyk 2016) | Not relevant, not needed Where it's not mentioned. (Pietkiewicz & Skowrońska-Włoch 2017) |

title. A simple form of content analysis (Neuendorf 2016; Elo & Kyngäs 2008) had been carried out on the collected words to order them in higher categories according to their scientific fields within psychology. This way we included subcategories. When all the keywords were put into subcategories, we systematized them and divided them into supra categories.

Results

Our first step was to analyze the underlying paradigmatic considerations, focusing on the frequencies of the different aspects. Table 3 depicts the density of our previously defined subcategories in the articles and differentiates the positivist/postpositivist and the interpretive/constructivist aspects used.

Our findings show that 80% of the articles shared the concept of multiple realities, which is the basis of the interpretivist/constructionist view. Strong constructivist dominance appeared in the aspects of the researchers' activity (71%), participants' activity (85,71%), undefined and noncontrolled variables (65,61%), and discursive representation (74,29%).

According to our results, generalization was the most commonly used postpositivist aspect, which suggests that even the authors of these qualitative researchers try to generalize their results. Interestingly, the category where

Table 3. Frequencies of the different paradigmatic aspects used in the articles.

| Positivist Aspect | Frequency | Constructivist aspect | Frequency | Both | No data |
|--|----------------|--|----------------|----------------|---------------|
| One objective reality | 4 (11,43%) | Multiple realities | 28 (80%) | 3 (8,57%) | 0 |
| Absolutist epistemology | 5 (14,23%) | Relativist epistemology | 20 (57,14%) | 9 (25,71%) | 1 (2,86%) |
| Objective, direct, theory-driven, hypothesis-focused knowledge | 4 (11,43%) | Subjective, nondirect, data-driven, interpretative knowledge | 20 (57,14%) | 10 (28,57%) | 1 (2,86%) |
| Material phenomenon | 0 | Human/intentional phenomenon | 33 (94,29%) | 2 (5,71%) | 0 |
| Metrically represented | 2 (5,71%) | Discursively represented | 26 (74,29%) | 7 (20%) | 0 |
| Deductively analysed | 4(11,43%) | Inductively analysed | 19 (54,29%) | 11 (31,43%) | 1 (2,86%) |
| Generalizing | 16 (45,71%) | Staying on descriptive level | 13 (37,14%) | 5 (14,29%) | 1 (2,86%) |
| Previously given (narrow/fix) research question | 8 (22,85%) | Flexible (broad) research question | 22 (64,86%) | 4 (11,43%) | 1 (2,86%) |
| Neutral (passive) researcher | 6 (17,14%) | Involved (active) researcher | 25 (71,43%) | 3 (8,57%) | 1 (2,86%) |
| Passive participant | 4 (11,43%) | Active participant | 30 (85,71%) | 1 (2,86%) | 0 |
| Defined and controlled variables | 4 (11,43%) | Undefined and noncontrolled variables | 23 (65,71%) | 7 (20%) | 1 (2,86%) |
| Scientific presentation | 3 (8,57%) | Lay (quotations) presentation | 26 (74,29%) | 6 (17,14%) | 0 |
| Reproducibility need for replication | 8 (22,86%) | Reproduction not relevant, not important | 20 (57,14%) | 3 (8,57%) | 4 (11,43%) |

Table 4. Number of used paradigms of the articles by country (n=35).

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|---|-------------------------|
| | Interpretivist/ constructionist | postpositivist/ positivist | mixed paradigms with postpositivist dominance | mixed paradigms with interpretive/ constructionist dominance | cannot be identified |
| Slovakia | 1 (2,86%) | 1 (2,86%) | 1 (2,86%) | 1 (2,86%) | 3 (8,57%) |
| Romania | – | – | – | 3 (8,57%) | 4 (11,43%) |
| Poland | 3 (8,57%) | – | 1 (2,86%) | 2 (5,71%) | 1 (2,86%) |
| Czech Republic | – | 5 (14,29%) | – | – | 1 (2,86%) |
| Hungary | 2 (5,71%) | 1 (2,86%) | – | 1 (2,86%) | 3 (8,57%) |

both considerations reached relatively high frequency was the method of coding. Deductive 4 (11,43%) and inductive 19 (54,29%) coding systems seemed to be used. In 11 articles both theory-driven and data-driven research appeared to be used simultaneously. In some cases interviews and the coding process followed some theories, or inductive coding was completed with the coding system of a handbook (Ghorghe & Liao 2012). In such cases, research questions coming from a theoretical standpoint might have an effect on the coding process and the results. The barrier between theory influenced coding process and the inductive coding was ambiguous.

Among Czech and Polish articles we found interpretive/constructive paradigmatic considerations (five Czech and three Polish articles), while “cannot be identified” articles were the most common among the Romanian (four), Slovakian and Hungarian articles examined (three, three). All in one presence of the used paradigms are depicted in Table 5.

Most of the articles could not be clearly classified into the first four clusters because of the lack of description provided or the opposing paradigmatic aspects they used simultaneously. Constructivist dominance appeared among the studies analyzed (11). However, clearly positivist articles were found to be rare (two). Mixed paradigms seemed to be frequent (10).

Twelve articles were put in the fifth category because they used simultaneously the postpositivist and the interpretive considerations or not enough information was given for the categorization. The interpretivist/constructivist paradigm seemed to be used in almost one-third of the articles examined, and two used a dominantly interpretivist paradigm. Postpositivist was the

Table 5. Frequencies of the paradigms used (n=35)

| | |
|--|-------------|
| 1. interpretive/constructivist | 11 (31,43%) |
| 2. positivist/postpositivist (mixed methods, quantifying qualitative approach) | 2 (5,71%) |
| 3. mixed paradigms with postpositivist dominance | 2 (5,71%) |
| 4. mixed paradigms with constructionist dominance | 8 (22,86%) |
| 5. cannot be identified | 12 (34,29%) |

least frequently used. We found two pure postpositivist articles and two dominantly postpositivist ones.

Our second research goal was to analyze the frequency of the different methods used in the articles. **Figure 1** shows the distribution of the methods.

Twenty-two percent of the article's accurate methodology was unspecified. These articles did not name or cite their applied methods. The second most popular choices were content analysis, thematic analysis, and methods, which were said to be based on grounded theory.

Our third goal was to detect the fields of qualitative research in Central-Eastern Europe. The categorization of the keywords of the articles is depicted in **Figure 2**.

Five categories emerged in the analysis of the keywords. The titles are written in capital italics, and subtitles are written in bold with a capital initial letter.

The keywords are presented in simple letters, and the sizes of them represent their frequencies. **Figure 2** represents the prevalence of each of the five categories. They were social psychology (42,95%), health and clinical

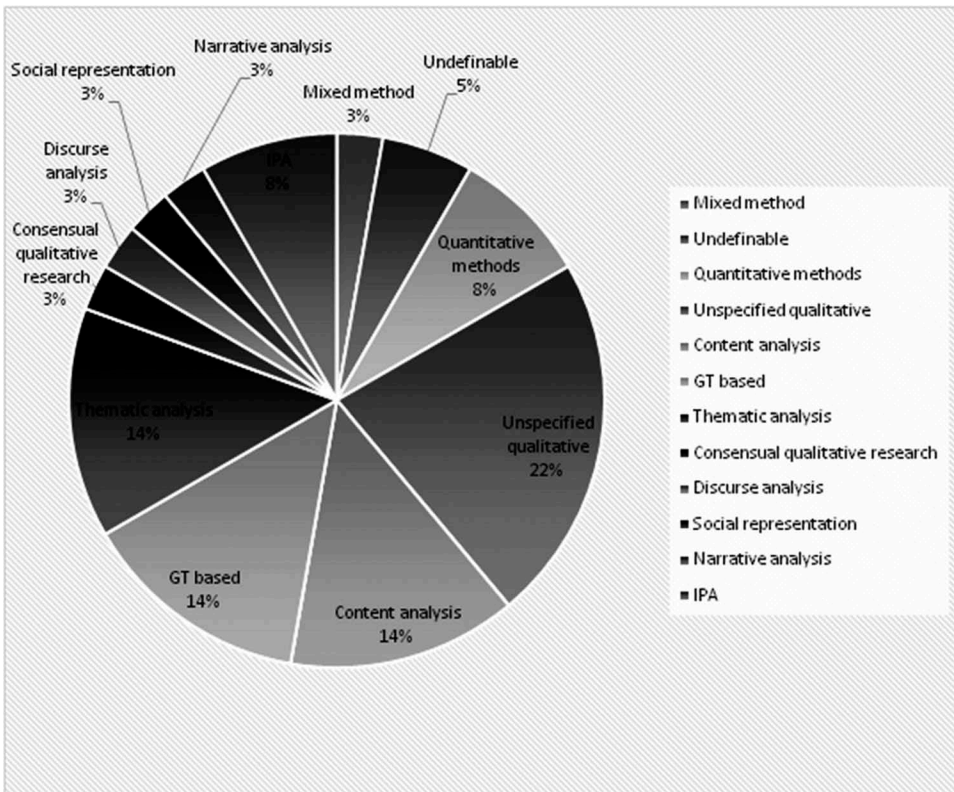


Figure 1. The percentage of the different methods applied in the articles.



Figure 2. Thematic analysis of the keywords.

psychology (31,54%), methodology (16,1%), developmental psychology (7,38%) and religion (2,01%).

Discussion

The aim of this study was to assess qualitative psychology in Central-Eastern Europe. We analysed the paradigms, the methods, and the fields of 35 qualitative research articles of five countries: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. Our findings show constructivist/interpretivist considerations seem to be dominant among the analyzed qualitative articles. In our study, postpositivist elements, such as generalization and deductive coding, also occurred. We found a substantial presence of paradigmatic eclecticism and confusion with the simultaneous usage of both constructivist/interpretivist and postpositivist considerations. According to the methodological analysis of the 35 articles, unspecified methods are used most frequently. Moreover, methodological descriptions were laconic and not detailed.

The content analysis of the keywords presented that the most commonly examined field is social psychology, which is in line with previous studies (Stainton-Rogers & Willig 2017). In the brief literature of qualitative research paradigms, counseling journals are analyzed by Ponterotto et al. (2017) and Gehart et al. (2001) because qualitative studies are the most used in the field of psychological counselling. Our study found counseling was mentioned only once.

The seeming paradigmatic inconsistency might be rooted in the sociological and ethnographical traditions where a study is considered to be qualitative when it uses interviews or focus groups (Demuth 2015). As sociology and ethnography have a longer tradition in the examined countries, this might cause a mixture of considerations and less strict methodology and epistemology than mainstream qualitative psychology. In psychology the reliability and transparency of qualitative studies have become vital and rigorous. However, qualitative psychology is still looking for its own identity and formula in the global psychological discourse, which might result in ambiguity (Gürtler & Huber 2006). Knoblauch et al. (2005) state that research questions in which qualitative methods are used might be influenced by political, economic, social, and cultural backgrounds of the researcher.

We suggest paradigms might be used in a mixed way unless the researcher uses them consistently and transparently by the description of the epistemological foundation, the methodological choices, and the process of analysis.

Reflections and limitations

Our aim was not to conduct a critical study but rather to explore the circumstances of postsocialist qualitative approaches and suggest some possible explanations for their state. Our study used postpositivist and interpretive/constructivist paradigmatic considerations at the same time in almost every coding aspect. As our study was based on our presupposition of the existence of paradigms, both deductive and inductive categories, theory and data-driven categorizations were used. Multiple realities and the objective existence of philosophical paradigms occurred at the same time. This study is neither a postpositivist nor an interpretivist/constructivist study, but rather is a mixture of them. Self-reflectively, we would put our study in the “cannot be categorized” category. But our examining process appeared to be a suitable one, providing a frame for the examination of paradigms. As a result, we could concentrate on the exact aspect of the paradigm considerations, and decisions were easier to make as they were dichotomous questions. However, we must state our method is reductionist and further refinements are needed, such as observing the interconnections of the categories and introducing the theoretical considerations of our method in a theoretical article.

Finding suitable articles proved to be difficult. We suppose that due to searching issues and because we could only analyze English language articles, our study could reach only a small part of the qualitative studies published in this area. Thus, we could present only a small section of it. As sampling turned out to be difficult and time-consuming, a small number of qualitative research papers were found. This is why we did not have the option of selecting articles based on their quality or using other criteria. Because of the small number of articles we had access to, which included studies carried out by a multinational research team where at least one author was Central-Eastern European were analyzed. We considered them to be connected to the research trends in this geographic area. However, it might lead to imprecision. The small amount of English language qualitative psychology research might be because of the language sensitivity of qualitative research, or the lack of proper language skills as well.

The 16 answers received from the Central-Eastern European universities were not enough to make generalizations or valid statements for the whole area. Information about the situation of qualitative psychology at universities was rarely available in English.

As we used deductive coding categorization, we focused on the hypothetical paradigms and fields of the studies in which the exact logic of the articles was not presented or discussed.

Without many previous studies on this topic, we had to create most of our research tools, such as our paradigm-analysis coding system, which requires further discussions, reviews, applications and refinement.

Suggestions for further research

The examination of qualitative paradigms and qualitative psychology in a geographic area is an unexamined field of the psychological discourse. We believe that because of its cultural and scientific background, it might be an important pathway for further studies as precious knowledge could be gained on the intercultural interpretations of epistemology, methodology, and ontology in a newly growing and progressing theoretical approach in psychological qualitative research. We consider it to be vital for qualitative research to create such reflections, mappings, and reviews to detect the quality of studies and also to examine the paradigms used and work on the paradigm theory as well.

Conclusions

The examination of how it is possible to manage plural epistemologies, methodologies, and ontologies simultaneously might also be needed in the theory of qualitative psychology. The American trend of qualitative

psychology suggests making qualitative research more transparent and adopting higher standards in the description of qualitative methods (Bluhm et al. 2011). However, Symon et al. (2018) draw criticism about whether the standardization of quality in qualitative research would be inappropriate and lead to the marginalization of alternative methods.

All in all, the rise of qualitative research was a paradigm shift; an answer to the positivist psychology's expanded anomalies. Perhaps the true nature of the qualitative approach is that it does not require a rigorously defined identity and formula or systematically structured frames.

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