

Qualitative Approaches to Dyadic Data Analyses in Family Communication Research: An Invited Essay

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This essay reviews interpretive approaches to dyadic analysis using qualitative data. After reviewing classic approaches to dyadic analysis of qualitative data, we explore some of the benefits these classic approaches offer family communication studies. We then look to three new approaches to dyadic analysis—multiadic analysis, affective analysis, and collaborative autoethnography—that can be of benefit to those who study families. We close with thoughts about observing family interaction and building theory across research paradigms.

INTRODUCTION

As Ganong and Coleman (2014) note in their recent review of qualitative family research, the embrace of dyadic methods and analysis holds strong potential for family studies, especially in terms of research innovation and the development of novel findings. Given that most dyadic approaches to data collection involve observing how different family members communicate both about their families and with each other, we believe dyadic methods can allow researchers to observe and theorize about the constitutive nature of family communication (Baxter, 2004), as well as to witness how families use communication to create and make meaning across situation and context (Manning & Kunkel, 2014a). To capitalize on this potential, we explore common dyadic research approaches and their benefits. We then present three nascent forms of dyadic analysis that could especially prove beneficial to family studies.

Classic Approaches to Dyadic Family Studies

Even though dyadic approaches to family research have been common over the past 30 years, dyadic qualitative research has been slow to develop within the communication discipline. That is not to suggest that qualitative data approaches have not been used to study family communication

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for an extended period of time. Over 20 years ago, Stamp (1994) interviewed 10 couples multiple times, both as individuals (i.e., separate interviews with husbands and separate interviews with wives) as well as couples (i.e., husbands and wives interviewed together). This approach allowed him to understand both how each parent-to-be saw his or her individual role as a parent, as well as how they came together to assume parental responsibility. Since the publication of Stamp's (1994) study, dyadic methods have seldom been used for studies of family communication. As Eisikovits and Koren (2010) note, dyadic *analysis* is even rarer. Such analysis, they contend, holds "much promise for deepening and broadening the content, as well as for the trustworthiness" of what researchers can know and learn about couples (p. 1642). In this essay, we extend dyadic analysis beyond the common approach of looking at couples—although that certainly is often important to family scholarship—and to larger notions of family. We especially consider how dyadic analysis benefits family communication research.

Benefits of Dyadic Analysis

Eisikovits and Koren (2010) are largely to credit with a recent interest in dyadic studies for scholars across multiple disciplinary and topic areas. As health researchers, they point out that one of the most important benefits offered by dyadic analysis is that it allows for researchers to observe overlap and contrast between couple members. That is, by interviewing each participant in a couple-relationship separately, the similarity or overlap in answers can be identified, as well as the difference or contrast. That, in turn, allows for researchers to see beyond each individual interview and into the meaning, perceptions of reality, and sense-of-being experienced by a dyad. These ideas are then tied into triangulation, or how a sense of certainty about each interviewee's account, can be achieved. Even though these aspects of dyadic interviewing are valuable, they contend, "the best-quality data can be collected from individual members of the couple," especially because the fear of information being revealed to a partner might influence the quality of data (Eisikovits & Koren, 2010, p. 1642). Still, they point to how several health-oriented topics—especially topics related to relationships—can benefit from dyadic analysis.

Although we appreciate that these benefits and limitations might be apt for many health contexts, as well as qualitative research studies that veer closer to the realist end of the qualitative continuum (Ellingson, 2009), based on our own research experiences and from reviewing the work of others we do not believe they align with the goals and aims of most interpretive or critical communication research studies. Rather than seeing difference or contrast as a lack of validity, we share Baxter's (2011) view that competing discourses often illuminate or even create social realities that can and should be of interest to researchers. Moreover, these differences across interviews can indicate meaning-making in action, or how people navigate reflection about their lived experiences (Manning & Kunkel, 2014a).

Differences across dyadic interviews can also indicate where and how marginalized or ignored voices are stifled (Baxter, 2011); the situations or contexts where some discourses, narratives, or actions emerge where others do not (Manning & Kunkel, 2014b); and a sense of emotion, latitude, experience, and feeling (Manning & Kunkel, 2014a) as they emerge both in and across interviews. In short, we do not believe that individual, joint, or dyadic interviews can solely be pointed to as the best approach; but, rather, that research questions about communication might point to each as an ideal approach for a particular study.

To be certain, dyadic approaches—especially using different interview types—hold many benefits and limitations for qualitative family communication researchers (see Table 1). In that sense, the design of an interview protocol is important, as research design has a direct impact on the type of data obtained that, in turn, has an impact on what kind of analyses can be used to explore the data.

MOVING DYADIC ANALYSIS FORWARD: THREE APPROACHES

Although dyadic qualitative research has been limited in family communication studies, we caution researchers interested in using such methods to avoid the limitations of using simple thematic analysis or initial coding approaches when analyzing dyadic data. In addition to some of the common pitfalls of using only thematic analysis (see Manning & Kunkel, 2014b, for discussion), many of the research questions involved with dyadic studies will demand more sophisticated approaches that will allow in-depth analysis of data. Fortunately, family communication scholars have access to many interpretive coding or discourse-analytic approaches that already allow for unpacking the complexities of dyadic data. These include contrapuntal analysis (Baxter, 2011), action-implicative discourse analysis (Tracy, 1995), and interpersonal iterations of dramaturgic coding (Dunn, 2014) and values coding (Manning, 2015). In the next section, we expand on three more coding approaches that we believe have tremendous potential for dyadic qualitative projects.

Multiadic Analysis: Drawing from Multiple Discourses

Because families often are more than one simple dyad, and instead hold the possibility for many dyadic connections, it is important to consider what dyads might be relevant for a given study. For example, a study about how a family of four communicates about cancer could involve the husband-wife dyad who will likely talk about cancer differently than the brother-sister dyad who might be focusing their discussions on different topics or concerns. When the family as a whole comes together, it is likely still that family members will communicate differently as the full family creates a different situation or context than the various dyads that could be formed from that family. To take advantage of these potential differences, Manning (2013) developed what he calls *multiadic analysis*, a way of tracing relationships between different discourses, especially in terms of how they influence each other.

In multiadic analysis, *discourses* represents both the talk generated by individuals, dyads, or groups as they are together in a particular situation and context; but then also any other external articulation that might be invoked by those same individuals, dyads, or groups as they come together. For example, in a cancer interview study, a brother and sister might discuss a pamphlet they received that tells them how they can cope when a family member is diagnosed with cancer. Depending on availability, the researcher could then use that pamphlet as another discourse of analysis in the study. Although such external discourses are important, much of the meaning-making found using multiadic analysis—especially in family communication studies—comes from looking at how individual interviews differ from dyadic interviews; and then how those interviews still differ from interviews with the full family. Multiadic interviews are open

TABLE 1
Five Modes of Dyadic Analysis for Family Communication Studies

<i>Interview Type</i>	<i>Ideal Use</i>	<i>Benefits for Family Communication Studies</i>	<i>Limitations for Family Communication Studies</i>	<i>Sources for More Information</i>
1. Individual interviews	Situations where family members are encouraged to share their particular perspectives, especially about sensitive topics; instances where individual family member stories are sought	Can allow triangulation for realist-oriented studies; allows researchers to be forthright and not worry about family members learning private information, opinions, or feelings	Researcher might have to consider how to present data in a way that maintains confidentiality (see Forbat & Henderson, 2003); missing elements or gaps will still be present in data; no direct view of family interaction	Forbat & Henderson, 2003; Messersmith, Kunkel, & Guthrie, 2015
2. Individual interviews by different interviewers	Situations where families might be tempted to discuss interview experiences; sensitive research topics where family members might fear an interviewer revealing private information in another session	Interviewer not influenced by previous interview(s); less risk of sensitive information being revealed across interviews to different participants	Involves multiple family members and interviewers being available at same time; requires high sensitivity toward the communication styles of different interviewers	Hellstrom, Nolan, & Lundh, 2005
3. Joint interviews	Research studies where observing family interaction is essential	Allows direct observation of how family members interact about topics; provides a sense of how family is constituted via communication	Individual accounts are not collected; dominant voices, even if not demonstrated during interviews, might influence what others do or do not say	Lannutti, 2013 (online joint interviews); Walker & Dickson, 2004
4. Both individual and joint interviews	Research that explores systems or processes; studies involving privacy management or secrecy; situations where one family voice might dominate	Allows same benefits of both individual and joint interviews; comparisons can be made across interviews to gain a sense of complexities in family communication	Previous interviews might affect future interviews; researcher must be especially cautious about what information from prior interviews is revealed across sessions; joint interviews can be emotionally intense (see Manning, 2010)	Manning & Kunkel, 2014b (see chapter about interviews); Stamp, 1994
5. Mixed and/or multiple interviews	Similar to when both individual and joint interviews are combined, but where additional dyads or groups of interviewees is needed based on a research question(s) or iterative analysis	Can allow even more insight into how family dyads or groups interact together and apart (e.g., mom and dad versus dad and son; or interviews with parents compared/contrasted to interviews with their children)	Participant exhaustion, depending on number of interviews; after following a same or similar protocol a number of times, participants might start to become too familiar with protocol, causing loss of spontaneity and/or information revealed; this approach is time consuming and resource intensive	Manning, 2013; Morris, 2001

to multiple possibilities. For example, in his studies exploring family purity pledges, Manning (2014b, 2015) chose to use the same interview protocol to interview each member of a family separately before bringing them all back together and using the exact same interview protocol. That allowed him to see what discourses introduced in individual interviews were segmented or muted when the family came together, as well as what new discourses were generated. Depending on a study's goals and aims, however, it might be that the researcher develops different protocols for a particular individual, dyad, or group.

Affective Analysis: Examining Emotion, Feeling, and the Fluidity of Meaning

As noted, dyadic interviews are especially good at allowing a sense of overlap and difference between the viewpoints of different people. We posit that because communication is constitutive of family (Baxter, 2004), and especially relationships (Manning, 2014a), it is important to consider how such overlap and difference both build notions of family as well as how families navigate or respond to particular ideas, people, social institutions, and the like. As Eisikovits and Koren (2010) indicate in their review of dyadic analysis, the common approach to examining overlap or difference often involves seeking some sort of certainty or even truth about what particular family discourses or narratives mean. Depending on the research question, such an approach certainly has some benefits, but we challenge family communication scholars to stretch further and consider the fluidity of meaning across situation and context. Specifically, we follow Manning and Stern (in press) in asserting that the objects, bodies, ideas, and social institutions involved with relationships—in this case, family relationships—can come together to form assemblages of affective meaning that can differ from situation to situation.

Affective analysis, then, involves understanding that people's actions or responses are often not based on logic or reason; rather, they assign meaning based on feeling, especially feeling in a particular place and time. As Seigworth and Gregg (2010) note, "Affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds" (p. 1). As research interviewers, it is important that we consider how the interview session we are co-creating situates a particular time and place for affective resonance. Through affective analysis, researchers can consider how different individuals or dyads come together to create different affect that, perhaps, results in different knowledge. For example, talk about a wedding ring might generate a different sense of performed emotion across interviews or even during specific topics within interviews. For a mother's interview, she might smile fondly remembering her own ring on her wedding day, grimace at the feelings of failure she endured when taking it off post-divorce, and yet show conflict about the lavish nature of her daughter's ring and whether it matches up with any sort of love her daughter might feel for her fiancé.

In contrast, a daughter's interview might find her also smiling when talking about the ring on her wedding day, exhibiting uncomfortable evasion when discussing the possibility of divorce, and expressing frustration with how her mother is jealous of the ring. As these two interviews indicate, the ring serves as an object of fluid meaning, as different affects inform what the ring is and can mean. The goal of affective analysis is not so much to create a list of such emotions or to develop articulations of how they are expressed—although those might make fine studies using another coding or analytical technique—but rather to consider how affect circulates through

different moments or beats in an ongoing affective economy. Those observations of affective change can then be iteratively paired with theory—most likely one that has been developed in the ongoing area of affect studies (e.g., Gregg & Seigworth, 2010)—to make a theoretical argument. In that sense, using affective analysis is more akin to rhetorical criticism than it is to traditional interpretive approaches such as thematic analysis, as the researcher is using the data as a text for observation and argument. Those interested in pursuing affective analysis are strongly encouraged to review Jackson and Mazzei (2012) who offer helpful guidelines for non-normative (i.e., codeless) qualitative data analysis.

Collaborative Autoethnography: Sharing and Building Stories

In our review of dyadic analysis, we also noticed—and would be remiss not to mention—that one particular area in family communication where dyadic approaches are being used in interesting and illuminating ways is via collaborative autoethnography. As Adams and Manning (in press) note, autoethnography has allowed researchers insights about families that might not otherwise be obtainable through more traditional qualitative research methods. Koenig Kellas (2010) points out, however, that autoethnographic methods are underrepresented in family communication studies. We believe that the benefits of collaborative autoethnography, or autoethnographic research that is developed in collaboration with others (Ngunjiri, Hernandez, & Chang, 2010), allow it to be a space where dyadic narrative research can embrace highly personal and nuanced accounts of lived experience.

Autoethnography involves “a researcher who employs personal narrative and ethnographic analysis to illuminate the relationship between lived experience and culture” (Foster, 2014, p. 447). Collaborative autoethnographers find ways to work together during all or part of the research process, often as a way to encourage deeper thinking, clearer and more evocative writing, and a sense of common or divergent connections (Ngunjiri et al., 2010). Such autoethnography might be written as an essay in a single voice where different collaborators’ stories are made clear; in patchwork style, where the different collaborators contributions blend together; or in another form that makes sense for a particular project (Ellis, 2004). The key idea is that analysis occurs through the contrast and/or interaction with a fellow autoethnographer. Ngunjiri and colleagues (2010) have developed a process that benefits both budding and experienced collaborative autoethnographers, one that involves a great deal of individual self-writing and reflection, as well as sharing, probing, meaning-making, and writing among a duo or group. For an excellent example of collaborative autoethnography, see Alemán and Helfrich’s (2010) touching account of each of their experiences with dementia and how it affected their families. In addition to offering illuminating stories from each author’s unique perspective, they also offer clear theoretical and practical implications that often accompany the best autoethnographic work.

CONCLUSION

In addition to reviewing some of the more-established approaches to dyadic analysis of qualitative data, we have also offered three newer and very different approaches to dyadic data analysis that can be of benefit to family communication researchers. Whether one is more comfortable

embracing more traditional or emerging approaches to dyadic analysis, we offer two final suggestions from the field based on our own dyadic studies. First, one of the greatest strengths of dyadic analysis is that it can often allow for a genuine sense of how families interact with each other. Although interview settings are certainly contrived, they still allow insights into how family members respond or react to ideas and especially to each other. Similarly, autoethnographic approaches certainly come from a particular point of view, but they also allow insights into mundane, everyday family experiences that researchers cannot directly observe. We encourage dyadic approaches such as those listed here because they do offer insights that more traditional methods might not.

Finally, we also encourage researchers to consider how the findings generated from dyadic approaches can be incorporated into ongoing theoretical discussions. One of the greatest strengths of interpretive-theoretical approaches is that they allow researchers to draw from different epistemological or ontological traditions for their work (Manning & Kunkel, 2014a), and, to quote Foster (2014, p. 448), the findings of dyadic research should not remain “separate (but equal?)” from other research traditions. Rather, we see dyadic qualitative approaches as a vital contribution to family communication studies that can defy, reinforce, or otherwise challenge or extend knowledge generated from other research paradigms.

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