Reviewer’s report

Title: How Participants Report Their Health Status: Cognitive Interviews of Self-Rated Health Across Race/Ethnicity, Gender, Age, and Educational Attainment

Version: 0 Date: 08 Jun 2017

Reviewer: Astrid Knoblauch

Reviewer's report:

I thank the authors for this interesting read. The paper is principally well written but I have three major and several minor comments to be addressed.

General and major comments:

* Throughout the manuscript, text sections appear in the wrong chapters. The authors have to make a clear distinction between 'results', 'methods' and 'discussion' and don't mix up text sections in the wrong chapters.

* An additional table should be created that lists the methods used and the corresponding classifications, outcomes, categories, etc. (more below).

* The discussion needs a major revision. It is now too much a repetition of the introduction, methods and results chapters. Instead, it should discuss the results found and compare them with other literature. Some of the introduction chapter could potentially be shifted to the discussion. The references given in the discussion are too few.

Abstract:

* In the first sentence, add '…to measure perceived health'.

* Under results, the first two sentences are describing methods: "Our qualitative analysis consisted of identifying and classifying various dimensions of the following analytical categories: Which types of health factors are mentioned, the valence of health factors, the temporality of health factors, conditional health statements, and response process statements. We examined whether the presence of each dimension of an analytical category varies across sociodemographic groups."
Introduction:

* The introduction is very lengthy. Try to trim down to the point where possible.

* Page 5: "(but see Manderbacka ….. for exceptions."": This raises more questions than it answers. What are those exceptions?

* Page 8: Starting from "We identified and classified the following…." until the end of this chapter belongs to Methods, not Introduction.

Methods:

* The authors should explain why they have done two rounds of interviews and discuss in the Discussion chapter, how this could have influenced the results.

* The authors should provide the questionnaire as a supplementary file.

* There should be a statement on how many interviewers conducted the interviews and how they were recruited. Consequently, there should be a discussion in the Discussion chapter, on how this recruitment and number of interviewers could have biased the results. Same goes for the coders.

* In light of the mixing up of text elements and the complexity of the methods used, I suggest to the authors to make a table that explains the methods used, the classifications applied, the categories made, etc. This would very much simplify the readers understanding instead of having it dispersed throughout the text.

Results:

* The table in appendix A is describing the study population and is therefore the first important finding of the present research, hence, put as Table 1 of the manuscript. Consequently, the first sub-chapter in the Results chapter should be describing the study population. This is also important because the authors put an emphasis on the different groups - as mentioned on several occasions as well as the title of the manuscript.

* Rethink the sub-chapter titles. If leaving them as a question "Which types of health factors inform health ratings" add a question mark. Alternatively, formulate as a result "Health factors informing health ratings." Same for "How health factors…"

* In the following, text in this chapter that is methods:
As described above, we divided the transcripts into units of talk or utterances that corresponded to the unique coding categories.

Everything from page 15 "In psychology, ...." until page 16 "Table 2 shows the percent…" is METHODS.

Another way our analysis considers how participants account for health in formulating their answers […] such as "if I didn't have diabetes."

A cascade occurs […] my health is really good.

* In the following, text in this chapter that is discussion:

The differences across groups correspond to expectations based on previous research.

Given that men are less likely to seek health care than women (see Williams, 2003, for a review), it is plausible that health information from a practitioner or setting is particularly notable and salient for the men who have accessed it.

a finding consistent with prior research (Krause and Jay 1994).

This finding aligns with previous research which shows that Latinos have a more […] by invoking hierarchy or individuation.

highlighting an interesting juxtaposition […] to rate one's health (Kaplan and Baron-Epel 2003; Simon et al. 2005).

While the number of participants is too small […] given the gendered nature of ageism in the US (Holstein 2015).

Somewhat unsurprisingly, …

which is consistent with research showing that education is linked to better health

This finding highlights one pathway through which the apparent "health optimism" of men in the US […] or neutrality as opposed to polarity.

… that highlight the cognitive response […] (Tourangeau et al)

* Starting at page 17, the third paragraph, it seems that the results are no longer shown/presented in tables or figures. Is that intentional? I suggest to add the results in tables.
Discussion:

* The discussion chapter should start with a 1-2 sentence summary of the main findings.

* There is a mention in the Results chapter on page 15, that "While the number of participants is too small to draw any conclusions about group differences, …": this is surprising as this was - in my understanding - one of the main objectives of the research conducted.

* References need to be added here. Statements such as "This indicates that prior research…", "…correspond to those documented in prior research…", "but was previously undescribed" need to be underlined with references.

Other:

* The references are numerated in the bibliography but not in the text. Adhere to authors guidelines from the journal.

* The reference Williams 2013 is not listed in the bibliography. Also, is there a more recent study on this?

* Was the informed consent taken orally or written? Please add this to the informed consent statement in the declarations.

* The acknowledgement declaration has to be reworked. It is a repetition of the funding declaration instead it should address e.g. gratitude to study participants, authorities, interviewers, statisticians, etc.

* In Table 2 & 3, differences between socio-demographic groups should be shown. Or instead presented in another table.

* Table Appendix A: Add totals.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Unable to assess
Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

No

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

I am able to assess the statistics

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Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

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