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STRENGTHENING QUALITATIVE STUDIES AND REPORTS: STANDARDS TO PROMOTE ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

JAMES W. DRISKO

This article examines six criteria for conducting qualitative research and evaluating qualitative research reports in social work: (1) identification of the chosen philosophy/epistemology, (2) identification of audience and objectives, (3) specification of the study method, (4) identification of biases, (5) maintenance of social work ethics, and (6) assurance of consistency between conclusions and study philosophy, objectives, and presented data. Throughout, the author emphasizes the need to examine potentially disconfirming data in all qualitative research. These criteria are intended to guide qualitative researchers, inform the teaching of qualitative research methods, and aid review of qualitative research reports.

AFTER YEARS of sometimes heated debate between advocates of quantitative and qualitative approaches to social work research, a period of careful differentiation and some integration has begun. Social workers are moving away from a hierarchy of research methods toward an appreciation of the distinct and complementary strengths of differ-

ent epistemologies and methodologies (Bernstein & Epstein, 1994; Harrison, 1994), and an identification of the strengths and challenges of diverse ways of knowing (Hartman, 1990; Orcutt, 1994). Reid (1994) suggests: "We should move away from arguments about epistemological world views and devote our energy instead to clarifying and resolving the specific issues imbedded in the arguments" (p. 465). He asserts that we all have ways of appraising claims of knowledge, that they inevitably involve the use of evaluative criteria, and that the nature and purpose of evaluative criteria for qualitative research deserve professional discussion.

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Thorough and detailed evaluative criteria for qualitative research are rare in social work. However, as qualitative research efforts increase, and reports of this research appear more frequently on the desks of social work educators and editorial board members, clear evaluative criteria are needed. In the absence of such criteria, qualitative reports are often inappropriately assessed using quantitative criteria, or are subject to broad, devaluing critiques of qualitative research as a whole rather than specific and appropriate evaluation criteria (Leininger, 1994). Such critiques shed no light on the merits and limitations of qualitative research reports within their own terms and purposes.

The lack of criteria also impedes rigorous teaching of this content and practice—without standards for evaluating qualitative research reports within an identified epistemology and method, we undermine clarity and invite misunderstanding (Altheide & Johnson, 1994). We need explicit criteria for evaluating qualitative social work research that are consistent with the epistemology employed, widely understood, and valued for their contribution to knowledge. Such criteria are consistent with the Council on Social Work Education's (1994) Curriculum Policy Statement, which requires qualitative content in the master's-level curriculum.

Problem and Paradigm

At a general level, any area of social work research should be important, timely, and of predictable interest to an audience, and specific research questions should be relevant, illuminating, and of practical significance. Different approaches to prediction/confirmation and understanding/discovery can fulfill these general criteria. No research paradigm (or theory or model) is inherently more important, relevant, or illuminating than

any other (Hartman, 1990, 1994), although certain paradigms may be more or less effective at answering a specific question. Both the research paradigm and research method should be selected to shed the most light on a specific problem for a given purpose and audience. Once a paradigm has been selected, we should evaluate the merits of the research assumptions and goals within the philosophy/epistemology that underpins the paradigm. Once a method has been selected, we should evaluate the merits of the data collection and analysis within the parameters of the chosen paradigm. Overall evaluations have their place, but these should not be confused with evaluations within specified parameters and purposes.

Six broad criteria for evaluating qualitative reports are suggested in this article. These criteria are often relevant to one another or function synergistically. As a whole, they are intended to help authors of qualitative studies orient their work and others to evaluate qualitative research reports. Table 1 lists questions for each of the six assessment areas.

Criterion 1: Specifying the Philosophical Framework

Identifying the philosophical framework that underpins the qualitative study is the first criterion for internally consistent and meaningful research. Criteria for evaluating qualitative research must fit within the philosophical/epistemologic assumptions, purposes, and goals of the paradigm selected for the research. Yet qualitative research is not a "unified tradition" (Riessman, 1994, p. xii). Glaser (1992) notes that qualitative research is actually a family of approaches. In this family there are some close relations, some distant relations, some extended kin, some odd cousins, and a few nasty divorces. Given this context, clarifying the chosen framework is crucial.

Table 1. Questions for Evaluating Qualitative Studies and Reports in Six Areas

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1. Is the philosophy/epistemology of the study clearly identified?
 2. Are the objectives and the audience for the study clearly identified?
 3. Is the methodology of the study clearly identified and consistent with the stated philosophy and objectives?
 - Is the sample, and rationale for its selection, clearly stated and consistent with the study philosophy and objectives? Are efforts to include possibly contradictory cases or evidence clear?
 - Are any claims to transferability or generalizability clearly stated and consistent with the study philosophy, objectives, and sample?
 - Are the means of data collection clearly identified and consistent with the study philosophy and objectives?
 - Are the means of data analysis clearly identified and consistent with the study philosophy, objectives, sample, and collected data set(s)? How is contradictory evidence included and understood?
 - Are the data and analysis
 - Credible?
 - Confirmable/Disconfirmable?
 - Meaningful in context?
 - Complete? Saturated?
 4. Are biases identified and addressed in a manner consistent with the study philosophy and objectives?
 5. Are social work ethics maintained explicitly?
 6. Are the study's analysis, conclusions, and recommendations consistent with, and limited to, the study philosophy, objectives, and presented data?
 - Do the data and analysis support claims of recurrent patterns or preliminary theory development?
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Identifying the philosophical foundations of a study may be a difficult process; terminology is variable and often disputed. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) identify four paradigms or theories that may serve as the foundation for qualitative research: positivist/post-positivist approaches, interpretivist/constructivist approaches, critical approaches, and feminist/post-structural approaches (they appear to exclude what they label as ethnic or cultural studies). Greene (1994) identifies four somewhat different paradigms: post-positivism, pragmatism, interpretivism, and critical approaches. Researchers in anthropology and nursing have identified a blended variant called *ethnoscience* that employs sentence completion measures to define the culture of a group or organization (Bernard, 1988; Boyle, 1994). Patton's (1986) utilization-focused evaluation is a pragmatic approach blending quantitative/post-positivist conceptualization and

methods with the qualitative data collection and data analysis methods of participant observation and grounded theory. Allen-Meares and Lane (1990) describe a similar pragmatic blending of quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods in social work.

Qualitative social work research has both advocates of particular paradigms (Dean, 1993; Rodwell & Woody, 1994) and of meta-level research theories that bridge paradigms. Heineman Pieper (1989, 1994) has identified an overarching "heuristic" paradigm that appears to frame all research within a realist meta-level construction. Tyson (1995), who has elaborated on Heineman Pieper's work, has examined the processes involved in heuristic approaches. The work of Anastas (1995) and Anastas and MacDonald (1994) has advanced "fallibilistic realism," which takes into account the context of the researcher and acknowledges multiple internal realities and a "knowable"

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external world. Burnette (1994) has used an approach that blends summary quantitative data with qualitative analyses of transcribed interviews with elders facing the many challenges of chronic illness. Drisko (1995) has also employed both quantitative and qualitative data and analytic methods in a pragmatic utilization-focused evaluation of family preservation programs from the consumer's perspective. All of these models offer frameworks that may be used by social work researchers to orient their work.

Once a philosophical framework is selected, the researcher must use methods consistent with the framework. In nursing, Leininger (1994, p. 101) cautions, "One cannot mix research methods across qualitative and quantitative paradigms, but one can mix methods within each paradigm." Unless the paradigm being used is clearly defined, however, researchers run the risk of mixing methods across qualitative paradigms as well. This may violate the purposes and coherence of the paradigm, which in turn robs both the researcher and those who evaluate the report of a basis for assessing coherence of formulation, method, and analysis.

**Criterion 2:
Specifying the Goals and Audience**

Explicitly identifying the objectives and audience for the study is the second criterion for evaluating qualitative reports.

Greene (1994) asserts that research paradigms differ in the types of questions they best address and the audiences to which they most appeal. For example, large-scale, quantitative, confirmatory studies tend to hold more appeal for macro-level policy planners, while qualitative, understanding-oriented studies tend to appeal to meso-level program directors and micro-level practitioners. In social work, Hyde (1994) and Solomon (1994) have described the merits of understanding-oriented qualitative organizational studies, and Dean (1993), Gilgun (1994), and Ruckdeshel, Earnshaw, and Ferrik (1994) have all identified micro-scale analysis as particularly useful to practitioners.

Identification of the study objectives and audience may help shape the methodology selected. For example, program managers, supervisors, and practitioners may find qualitative evaluations of particular programs very useful because the research distills a range of viewpoints on specific program activities and effects. Policy planners, however, may find this type of small-scale research less useful because the findings may not be generalizable to other settings. Standpoint research often provides case-specific knowledge with great clarity and merit, but may not claim a generalizable result (Swigonski, 1994). The merits of a given qualitative approach are best assessed by taking into account the objectives and proposed audience, and the specified philosophical framework.

**Criterion 3:
Specifying the Methodology**

In all reports, the researcher must clearly identify the methodology employed in the study and demonstrate its consistency with the study's philosophical base. The differing philosophical traditions that orient qualitative studies often

suggest different methodologies. For example, critical studies, based on particular value premises, may require different methods than a realist study of the same content area. Methodological considerations include the nature of the sample, data collection methods, methods of analysis, and methods of data presentation.

Sample

Researchers should specify the nature of the study sample and the rationale for its selection within the context of study objectives. For example, research on the phenomenologic experiences of an understudied group can be conducted with samples of different sizes and compositions. Creating a detailed portrayal of a single experience may require only a few key informants, but developing a grounded theory about a life event will require participants with a range of views and experiences (see Glaser and Strauss' concept of theoretical sampling in Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The researcher must actively seek out and include participants who can challenge preliminary theories. Clearly, differences in study philosophy will also lead to different sampling decisions; therefore, researchers must align their sample and sampling methods with their selected research paradigm.

Seeking out, reporting, and weighing contradictory evidence are important in establishing the transferability (generalizability) of research findings. Research may present diverse experiences meaningfully and effectively without consideration of alternative or contradictory viewpoints—for example, analysis of extremely deviant cases can be immensely informative in itself (Patton, 1987). Research intended to lead to the development of general theories applicable across persons and settings, however, requires an analysis of alternative viewpoints and conclusions. Such analysis is possible only

if the initial sampling is purposefully conducted. Similarly, research claiming to establish the transferability of findings or recommendations from one setting to another requires a sample of the appropriate size and composition.

Transferability

Transferability describes the applicability of findings and conclusions derived from one context to a second context (Leininger, 1994). (Social workers also apply the term "generalizability" to qualitative work [Reid, 1994], but this term implies a paradigm-specific goal to develop general laws that may not be the actual objective of qualitative study [Lincoln & Guba, 1985].) As previously noted, the transferability of results is often important to the consumers of qualitative studies. Any claims to transferability should be clearly stated and should be consistent with the study philosophy, objectives, and sample.

A notable limitation of many qualitative studies is the lack of explicit analysis of the transferability of study findings. Some qualitative researchers offer vivid, moving, and unique portrayals without comment on the transferability of the findings. Findings on health care issues, family violence, and gender issues have been presented without discussion of the limits to their transferability, which may make wide application seem warranted. Without guidance from the researcher, consumers of such reports are left to formulate their own views about the transferability of the findings.

Data Collection and Reporting

Researchers should detail the means of data collection employed in their research. A central issue in the credibility of any study is how and under what conditions the research data are collected. Although the literature reveals several

approaches to collecting qualitative research data, the researcher should ensure that the method selected is fully consistent with the study philosophy and objectives. Most qualitative researchers employ flexible data collection methods that evolve to meet unexpected data and sources (Anastas & MacDonald, 1994), which is a great asset in understanding-oriented research. For example, qualitative evaluation may employ interviews, record reviews, reviews of published materials about a program (such as annual reports and funding submissions), and participant observation (Patton, 1987). The interviews and records serve as texts, and participant observation data allow a check of how the texts correspond to enacted programs, staff member behaviors, and client reactions. Reflections on participant observation data, called memos, are permanently recorded notes that may shape or reshape the analysis and interpretation of the text-based data by allowing the researcher to gauge the trustworthiness of texts as portrayals of participants' actions and experiences. In this sense, data collection and analysis work in tandem. Texts and memos should be permanent records that permit others to confirm findings and interpretations. Detailing how and what data are collected is vital to the study's coherence and completeness.

In many instances, researchers find it difficult to report sufficient qualitative raw data to allow readers to form their own interpretations. In a print-format report, raw data such as texts and memos can require considerable "page space"; nonprint reports such as audio/video-tapes of participant observation can be a technical challenge to produce and to integrate with a manuscript. All too often, these editorial challenges lead authors to offer a single illustration in the participant's own words. With limited raw data, readers have neither opportunity

to ascertain the accuracy and completeness of the researcher's interpretations, nor a basis on which to develop their own interpretations.

Another challenge facing qualitative researchers is to report enough data to illustrate how they formulated codes. Leininger (1994) notes that claims of recurrent patterns in qualitative data need documentation. Because coding summarizes participants' views and experiences, researchers should describe what they include in and exclude from key codes, and, if space permits, demonstrate how they developed their coding system. (This type of reporting is in stark contrast to quantitative research reports, in which data are typically presented in highly summarized form with interview questions or test items omitted.) Detailing recurrent patterns is crucial to the credibility of the analysis and conclusions of the study.

Data Analysis

Researchers should clearly identify their methods of data analysis and ensure these are consistent with the study philosophy and objectives. There are well-elaborated methods of data analysis applicable to several forms of qualitative research. Perhaps the most familiar is grounded theory, with its multistage coding procedures and steps of theory development (Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). However, given the current curricula in social work education, social workers may not know the specifics of even grounded theory analytic methods. Therefore, researchers should offer ample information about coding procedures and other aspects of data analysis within a qualitative research report.

Other well-developed data analysis methodologies are found in narrative analysis (Mishler, 1986; Riessman, 1993), discourse analysis (Labov, 1982; Levinson, 1983; Nye, 1994; Sherman,

1994), applied ethnography (Van Maanen, 1995), and utilization-focused evaluation (Patton, 1986, 1987). Until the analytic methods of these and other qualitative research approaches are taught in schools of social work, researchers must extensively describe their data analysis methods in reports.

Phenomenological and Critical Studies

Data analysis methodologies differ among phenomenological investigations and critical studies. Cohen and Omery (1994) differentiate between eidetic (descriptive) and hermeneutic (interpretive) schools of phenomenology. Detailed descriptions of either phenomenologic method relevant to human services are quite rare (Cohen & Omery, 1994; Giorgi, 1985). Eidetic phenomenological studies offer illuminating description, but may offer little in the way of an analytic framework. This emphasis may require readers to provide the analysis and sort out implications for practice or policy. Thus, the border between description and interpretation as data analytic methods may be uncertain in some phenomenological studies, posing challenges for readers and reviewers.

In critical studies, data analysis centers on the application of an often pre-established interpretive standard to the collected data. This interpretive standard is often a value perspective, which shapes the interpretation of the data. For example, Marxist critical studies typically and purposefully focus on the relationships between workers and those holding power over employment and production. Some feminist critical studies are directed to "challenging and transforming the patriarchal construction of reality" (Davis, 1994, p. 63). Such critical studies can offer important and transformative insights into social events, allowing readers to understand the unarticulated value premises implicit in everyday conduct.

However, critical studies must explicitly consider available evidence that may contradict the chosen value frame. Therefore, research reports of critical studies must analyze alternative interpretations of data and show them to be limited. Such efforts demonstrate the researcher's acknowledgment of potential biases and enhance the overall credibility of critical studies.

Four Criteria for Assessing Qualitative Data Analysis

General interpretive criteria exist for assessing data analysis in qualitative studies (Altheide & Johnson, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Leininger, 1994; Reid, 1994; Rodwell & Woody, 1994). The application of these criteria varies across the philosophical schools of qualitative research. Four widely reported criteria are offered here, all of which are applicable across the range of qualitative approaches. These interpretive criteria refer broadly to the methods of capturing and conveying the experiences and meanings of research participants/informants. Because understanding, rather than prediction or causal inference, is typically the goal of qualitative research, researchers seek uniqueness, authenticity, and revelation. In addition, qualitative researchers must maintain accuracy to local, subjective meanings in the processes of data coding and summarizing results for publication, and reduce the potential for bias via self-awareness, efforts to find contradictory data, and efforts to develop alternative interpretations.

The first interpretive criterion is *credibility/believability*, sometimes called truthfulness (Altheide & Johnson, 1994; Reid, 1994). Data and analysis must fully convey what local participants know or experience within their local context (Leininger, 1994), and interpretations must be authentic and accurate to the descriptions of the primary participants.

The experiences of observers and other forms of data offer external (etic) perspectives that may add to our understandings and interpretations of internal, subjective (emic) knowledge, creating a credible, cumulative whole. The whole, as presented to the reader, must be believable and reflect the participant's world, complemented but not reshaped by the researcher's interpretations and summarization.

As discussed previously, extensive reporting of raw data in the form of the participant's own words or the researcher's descriptions of behavior establishes credibility by allowing the reader to decide how accurately the researcher has summarized and interpreted others' experiences, behaviors, and understandings.

The second interpretative criterion is *placing meanings in context* (Leininger, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Riessman, 1994). Describing and linking data to a context in which the data were generated are strengths of qualitative research. Only within particular contexts or settings do certain qualitative data gain meaning or reveal the participant's understanding or perspective. Qualitative reports must convey the "local" perspective, and they must establish how such perspectives or interpretations are consistent with, or conflict with, external interpretations. Linking data to context and providing a sense of the wholeness of the situation, event, or environment is central to the coherence and credibility of a qualitative report. Readers can assess the cogency of the analysis, the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations of meanings, and the transferability of findings when they have before them data oriented in the participant's context.

The third interpretative criterion is *confirmability*, which refers to the researcher's efforts to corroborate data and to challenge and/or affirm interpretation or theory (Reid, 1994). Multiple,

repeated instances of some phenomena, obtained from direct observation or reports from primary sources, enhance both credibility and confirmability. "Feedback sessions" with participants to establish that research codes are accurate help confirm the researcher's interpretation and enhance the study's overall credibility. Provision of extensive original data, or illustrative examples, allows readers to develop their own interpretations of data, gauge the suitability of coding, understand the data analysis, and corroborate research findings. The consistency of what is reported as seen and heard with other material sources also establishes confirmability.

Qualitative research reports should describe the nature and extent of confirmatory activities. Explicit description of the purposes, content, and extent of feedback sessions is useful to the reader, as are descriptions of "audit trails" and other activities undertaken by the researchers to confirm interpretations and aid credibility. When reports are specific in this area, researchers establish a trail that allows others to understand and replicate the original analysis.

The fourth interpretative criterion is *completeness* or *saturation*, which refers to the comprehensiveness of both the data collection and analysis. Several questions can help assess saturation: Has the researcher exhaustively studied the experiences or events under study (Patton, 1987)—that is, are the reported data comprehensive, and the description thick and broad (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990)? Has a point of saturation been reached where further informants repeat data already provided and add no more to the development of codes, interpretation, or theory (Leininger, 1994)? With respect to data collection, establishing saturation means asking participants to say a little more when they claim to have said it all, and working on in the face of considerable repetition. With re-

spect to data analysis, this means reaching a point when the coding scheme is "saturated" and no additional codes are needed to capture the participants' experiences and meanings. Striving for saturation helps ensure that no data are omitted and that codes are comprehensive.

Another dimension of saturation can be established by the researcher's report. Do the data presented credibly convey a full view of the experience or events under study? Are the analyses comprehensive, with contradictions explored, alternatives examined, and differences between local and external contexts analyzed?

The relative importance of each of these interpretive criteria may vary with the philosophical frame and objectives of a given study, but understanding-oriented studies that employ interpretive analytic procedures should address each criterion to strengthen the academic integrity of results and reports.

Criterion 4: Identifying Biases

Explicitly identifying sources of potential researcher bias, including initial expectations of study results, strengthens the credibility of qualitative reports (Hyde, 1994; Reid, 1994). Bias in qualitative research refers to influences that impair complete or accurate sampling, data collection, data interpretation, and reporting. Qualitative researchers seek to limit bias through self-awareness; therefore, they should report any potential biases and note what content areas might be influenced.

Identifying funding sources or other institutional and organizational connections that might influence sampling, data collection methods, or interpretation of findings helps readers make their own interpretations of qualitative data and analyses. For example, Drisko (1995) notes in a report of his utilization-

focused study of family preservation services that program staff made the initial contacts with client families. Because some staff members reported they felt their work was being judged in the study, he was concerned that families presenting the biggest challenges might not be referred to study. Thus, Drisko made and reported efforts to actively seek out and include in the study sample families the staff might view as difficult. In this instance, a potential source of bias was recognized, addressed, and reported, which simultaneously strengthened the study's credibility and alerted readers to areas worthy of further investigation (e.g., seeking examples of criticisms and complaints from the families within the report).

At a more intimate level, the researcher must seek out and report both personal bias and interpretations that differ from those with which they began the study. Substantial self-reflection and self-analysis are needed because the researcher's ability to perceive and interpret participants' views and to clarify unique, situation-specific events is central to the accuracy and credibility of a qualitative study. Any influence that limits hearing, interpreting, and reporting data may be a source of bias. Hyde (1994) notes that, during her qualitative study of feminist organizations, her interest in the content and the purposes of the organizations influenced the consistency of her methodology. By directing the reader to her own biases and the methodologic limitations within the study, Hyde actually enhances the overall credibility of her study.

Criterion 5: Maintaining Social Work Ethics

Qualitative studies in social work should conform to social work research ethics, an area of discussion that has been somewhat neglected in the social work

literature. In general, social work research ethics are consistent with qualitative researchers' goals and activities, but some see them as most "beneficial as a *guideline* that alerts researchers to the ethical dimensions of their work *prior* to entry," and some believe they can restrict valuable research (Punch, 1994, p. 90). Specifically, researchers have argued that the desire to obtain some types of information may conflict with the ethic of getting participants' prior informed consent, especially in research such as critical studies of governments or corporations, participant observational studies of oppressed groups, and even unbiased quantitative studies. Punch (1994) reports that prior consent efforts may reduce participation of high-status or powerful individuals. In addition, those opposed to the research or researchers may render key data or informants unavailable to benefit their own interests.

Nonetheless, social work values on autonomy and self-determination clearly prohibit such activity by social workers. The 1993 National Association of Social Workers' (NASW) *Code of Ethics* (NASW, 1993) offered little specific guidance to researchers. The newly revised *Code of Ethics*, however, is much more explicit and detailed (NASW, 1996, section 5.02), stating that social work researchers must gain prior written consent from thoroughly informed research participants. Only when "rigorous and responsible review of the research" justifies its value, and "equally effective alternative procedures" including informed consent are not feasible, is waiver of explicit consent ethical (section 5.02g).

Criterion 6: Consistency of Conclusions with Study Philosophy and Data

The analysis, conclusions, and recommendations of a qualitative study should be consistent with the study philosophy

and objectives, and limited to the presented data. The purposes of qualitative research range from in-depth illustration of individual viewpoints, to thick description of shared experiences, to evaluation of cases and programs, to the development of theory. Thus, qualitative reports will vary widely in the nature and extent of their conclusions and recommendations. Illustrating a subjugated viewpoint may require little discussion by the author; critical analysis of the same viewpoint, however, requires extensive discussion and analysis to yield meaningful conclusions. Qualitative evaluation requires careful analysis to demonstrate how the researcher derives recommendations from data and to establish limits to the transferability of the recommendations. Developing grounded theory requires careful and extensive analysis to assure the theory is credible, complete, and meaningful in content as well as to establish the relevant contexts and settings for its application. Researchers must offer conclusions consistent with their chosen philosophical approach and method and frame interpretation of findings within the original study setting. Such points of coherence are important to the study's overall credibility and to the utility of conclusions and recommendations offered.

A research report that does not describe the original setting of the study runs the risk of inappropriate overgeneralization from specific data collected within a specific context. Claims of transferability to other settings should be made with sound, explicit rationales, and should identify any limits to the transferability of findings and recommendations. Where theory development is a research objective, claims of recurrent patterns within the data or preliminary theories must be consistent with the collected and reported data. Theory, like discussion and recommendations, should be presented with

identified limits to its applicability and transferability. Researchers should avoid general, context-less, theoretical statements.

Qualitative research is a powerful means to identify and describe "local theories." In these studies, researchers should compare qualitatively derived local theories to the interpretations and meanings framed by formal theories on similar content. The context-based limitations to formal theory often become quite apparent in comparison to local theories-in-use. Such comparison may yield new insights about both local and formal theories.

Implications for Social Work Education and Research

The Council on Social Work Education's latest Curriculum Policy Statement (CPS) mandates that educators teach content on qualitative research methodologies to students at the master's level (CSWE, 1994). It also mandates attention to ethics and values throughout the social work curriculum. (As previously mentioned, discussion of ethical issues in qualitative research has been minimal within social work.) This article advances the view that *all* qualitative research in social work must conform to professional ethics.

The CPS also mandates content on analysis of research questions, methodologies, data, and the conclusions of research reports. All of these concerns apply to qualitative studies and assume criteria for assessing qualitative research. It is hoped that the criteria presented here will promote discussion of the academic integrity of qualitative research and reports, serve as reminders and guidelines to qualitative researchers in social work, contribute to teaching content on conducting qualitative research and preparing research reports, and serve as

standards for reviewers of qualitative studies. In all, use of these criteria should strengthen qualitative research and enhance the academic integrity of qualitative reports in social work.

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