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How Do We Talk to Each Other? Writing Qualitative Research for Quantitative Readers

Linda Liska Belgrave
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The growth of qualitative research holds the potential for vastly enriching our understanding of phenomena in the health sciences. However, the potential of this trend is hampered by a widespread inability of quantitative and qualitative researchers to talk to each other. The authors' concern in this area grows out of our experience reviewing small grant applications for the National Institute on Aging, where they frequently find qualitative research proposals scoring worse than do those using quantitative approaches. This article addresses practical problems in communicating qualitative research to readers whose training and experience is primarily quantitative. Two themes running through the discussion are the need for detail and the explicit tying of methodological strategies to research goals.

Health researchers are dealing with many new issues, situations, and concepts. Important, understudied phenomena are emerging that will require multidisciplinary efforts to resolve, such as concerns about HIV, or spirituality and end-of-life issues. Until we know what the real issues are, our work in such areas calls for inductive, qualitative approaches. There is also increased recognition of our need to understand subjective health experiences, such as those of the pursuit of fertility treatment or navigation of the health care system by immigrants. Such work is best approached via inductive, qualitative research. Many of us are responding to these calls.

The audiences for qualitative research are many, and they have diverse backgrounds. We often write for, or speak to, those who do similar work. Just as often, however, our audience does not share our assumptions or language. In the current

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research environment, it can be critical for us to convince quantitatively oriented decision makers of the importance of conducting qualitative work.

We might wish to publish in a journal that is specialized by substantive area rather than method, to reach a specific audience. We might be applying for a research grant or beginning a dissertation with limitations on committee membership. In such cases, we are likely to face quantitative reviewers and readers. Although we all know that "if it isn't clear to the reader, it isn't clear," we probably honor this maxim most often in the breach. Yet, if we want reviewers whose training, experience, and assumptions differ from ours to help us by recommending publication, funding, or graduation, without compromising our paradigm(s), we have to write to them. If we want the work of quantitative researchers to be informed by concepts, theories, and insights resulting from our work or want health care providers or policy makers to use our findings in applied situations, it is in our interest to write in ways they will understand.

Although recognizing that tensions regarding paradigm, research strategies, and representation of the Other (Lincoln & Guba, 2000) contribute to the difficulties, we will focus in this article on the more practical challenges of communication. In this discussion, we speak of "qualitative research," broadly, as "multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 2), recognizing that various researchers emphasize differently the place of subjective meaning or the focus on individuals' lives in their work. We are assuming a predominantly inductive approach to research. Similarly, we refer to "quantitative" researchers, broadly, as those who do essentially deductive work, using data collected by a variety of methods and analyzed using quantitative, statistical techniques.

This article grows out of the authors' experiences on a National Institute on Aging review committee that evaluates applications for small research grants.¹ Frequently, grant applications written by qualitative researchers do not score as well as those written by their quantitative counterparts. This is not necessarily because the proposed qualitative research ideas are less meritorious than those in quantitative grant applications. More likely, it is because the qualitative researcher does not communicate the goals and methods of the proposed project effectively to quantitatively oriented researchers. In fact, the idea for this article comes from that review committee, from quantitative reviewers asking us to "please—write something." Before going to the heart of this article, we address two general issues that cut across sections of papers and proposals.

QUALITATIVE VERSUS QUANTITATIVE

Should you justify the use of qualitative rather than quantitative methods? Generally, if you have a well-written methods section, in which you explicitly and clearly tie your methodological approach to your research goals, this should be unnecessary. However, there might be occasions on which you want to provide such a justification. If you anticipate a problematic review, such as a dissertation committee that views the proposal as a test of methodological expertise or a submission to a strongly quantitative journal, you might choose to do so for tactical reasons. You might also decide that it would be better to submit elsewhere.

Another situation arises when it is not the methods but the research goals that might be questioned. If you propose to do inductive work in a field with a large existing literature, reviewers might raise legitimate questions. In this case, you would be wise to provide a brief rationale in your specific aims and use your background and significance section to demonstrate the need to answer your research question(s).

This begs the question of whether qualitative researchers should continually be put in the position of defending and explaining our work to quantitative readers. One could argue that quantitative researchers, especially when serving as reviewers of qualitative work, have an ethical obligation to acquire some level of expertise.² In our experience, some do attempt this. At the same time, however, circumstances sometimes dictate that our work will be read or reviewed by those who do not speak our language. Our goal in this article is to help qualitative researchers communicate successfully with those who do not share their paradigm(s) and reach a wider audience in the process.

WHAT READERS/REVIEWERS NEED TO KNOW

Inductive/qualitative researchers and deductive/quantitative researchers both make valuable contributions to knowledge, and we benefit from familiarity with each other's work. However, our different assumptions about the fundamental goals and potential results of research, different methods and strategies to reach those goals, and different language for explaining our goals and methods can create barriers between us.

It is important to understand that most reviewers are people of goodwill. In our experience, when a reviewer says something like "I wanted to like this proposal; the investigator is addressing an important problem and he/she has some good ideas, but it just doesn't look like science," he or she is expressing not hostility but frustration. The reviewer recognizes that the researcher has something worthwhile to pursue but cannot understand what the goals are or how the investigator plans to pursue them.

Following are some tactics intended to help avoid such situations. Fundamentally, reviewers of research proposals need to know what an investigator hopes to learn from a study and what he/she plans to do to achieve the study goals. A reader of a research report needs to know how the writer arrived at the findings presented in the report. We provide our suggestions primarily in terms of writing a grant application, but they could be incorporated into other types of proposals and manuscripts. For any reader, providing sufficient detail and explicitly tying methodological strategies to research goals are paramount.

SPECIFIC AIMS/PROBLEM STATEMENT

Compared to quantitative work, the aims of qualitative research are often broader and harder to specify. Even so, it is critical to state your research goals clearly. Writing a half-page, page, or more about an issue without stating flat-out what it is you want to learn from your research leaves a reader hanging. Quantitative reviewers

are used to writing, and seeing, hypotheses, which are quite specific. Given this, it might be useful to state explicitly that because your work is inductive, you have no hypotheses. A research question(s) is an excellent way to pull things together. Writing a research question forces you to focus your thoughts and summarize your goals in a single interrogative sentence (or, perhaps, one sentence per goal). Even when using fairly abstract terms (e.g., lived experience or strategies for managing), research questions are more specific, more clear, than paragraphs and pages. You can use a few additional sentences to explain your abstract terms if necessary.

If you are proposing a pilot study that is part of a larger research program, perhaps a qualitative-to-quantitative plan, explain that plan with some level of specificity. Showing the reviewer your long-range plans can help him or her see the potential value of your project.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE/LITERATURE REVIEWS³

Literature reviews should not differ much between quantitative and qualitative research proposals or reports. You want to lay out the background of your research problem, locate your position within the academic discourse, and convince the reviewer that you are sufficiently knowledgeable to make a meaningful contribution. An explanation of the theoretical background of a research problem is important; reviewers look for this. Discussion of your paradigm might be useful, particularly if it is not "mainstream," but do not get so caught up in this that you lose your reader. Explain what is needed—no less and no more. You want to keep the focus on your research problem and your work.

Do not limit yourself to the qualitative literature if there is relevant quantitative work available. Your reviewer will be familiar with the literature in the field, and a failure to cite it will leave a negative impression. Moreover, that literature is important. For instance, if you want to study the lived experience of a chronic physical ailment, providing prevalence rates shows how many people are affected. Reference to disability associated with the ailment addresses individual and social consequences. Both of these speak to the significance of your proposed work. Citing literature on social predictors of the ailment (e.g., gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status) prepares the reader for your plans to select research participants. Together, these show that you know as much about this problem as the literature provides. It is easy, at that point, to state that despite the amount of work that has been done, no one has looked at the precise aspect of this problem that you will examine.

METHODS

Flexibility is one of the major strengths of inductive approaches to research. As qualitative researchers, we go where the data take us, using "whatever strategies, methods, or empirical materials are at hand" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 2). As we begin to make sense of the phenomenon under investigation, we might change our approach, change our focus, add research sites, even develop new strategies or tools (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). However, this strength can appear as a weakness. We can

leave reviewers with the impression that we have no real plans or, in the case of finished research, that we flew by the seat of our pants, with little idea of our destination. These impressions are avoidable.

USING TECHNICAL LANGUAGE

Technical language appears, and potentially confuses, throughout our proposals and reports. Lofland and Lofland (1995) refer to social science as a “terminological jungle” (p. 6), listing ethnography, qualitative study, case study, field study, and more names for our basic methods. Moreover, our use of terms varies by discipline. A sociologist might use *grounded theory* as a fairly generic term to indicate inductive qualitative research. A nurse might have something much more specific in mind, including Glaser and Strauss’s original work (1967) and the further development of that tradition by Strauss and Corbin (1990), with any deviations seen as “not grounded theory.” Use technical language, but do not use it alone. Rather than simply writing that you will do “constructivist grounded theory” (Charmaz, 2000), explain this methodology and tie it to your constructivist research goals. Illustrate how your data collection and analysis are designed to help you reach those goals.

This problem of using different terms to mean the same thing and/or the same term to mean different things extends to specific techniques. Neuman (2000) lists three typologies of roles for field researchers. Lofland and Lofland (1995) bring us yet another scheme. Similar issues arise with technical terms for study participants, types of interviews, and the products of our analysis. Technical language is not jargon. Differences among “respondents,” “informants,” and “research participants” are not trivial. Neither are they clear, so it is risky to use any such term alone. For instance, if your participant observation involves Adler and Adler’s (1987) “active membership,” say so, but go on to explain the membership role you will fill and the nature of your participation.

SELECTION OF DATA SOURCES

When we do research, we collect data from some site(s), participants, or materials. Although we reserve the option of revising our plans, we need a starting point, some specific site, type of participant, or source of relevant materials. To describe data sources in a way that will be clear to quantitative reviewers, provide details, including the nature of data sources, the rationale for selection, and numbers. This can be difficult, because quantitative reviewers think in terms of drawing a sample (of better or poorer quality) from a defined population, whereas we are more likely to focus on a social world or phenomenon. These differences largely flow from the differences between deductive and inductive approaches and goals. When you understand that, you can explain things in ways that make sense to reviewers.

Some redundancy is not out of line. Before getting into the details, you can explicitly remind readers that your goals are inductive, goals of discovery and interpretation, rather than of hypothesis testing and generalizing. This immediately deflects the primary objection—that findings will not be generalizable.

Observations of Social Worlds

Observations, obviously, are observations of, or in, some concrete social world, usually a specific site or sites. Describe your chosen site(s) as clearly and concretely as possible. Include its conceptual appropriateness for your research, as well as the practical features of your choice. Is the physical setting relevant? If so, describe it. Do actors come together according to any sort of schedule? If so, what is that schedule? Roughly how many actors are involved? Can they be described in terms of basic demographic characteristics? Is there a formal structure involved? Your job here is threefold. You want to demonstrate to reviewers that (a) the site(s) you have chosen is appropriate for your study, (b) the site is adequate for the collection of the data you need, and (c) you are sufficiently familiar with the site to conduct research in it successfully.

Your rationale for the selection of your research site(s) should be explained clearly. If your selection was primarily pragmatic, do not try to hide this; readers will see through such attempts, and your credibility will be compromised. Quantitative researchers also work within such constraints and understand them. Should you be observing a particular social world because you are already a participant or because you have access, this speaks to feasibility. Consider the strengths this brings to your work. If you already know the setting fairly well, maybe you are in a position to anticipate key activities and/or events, or have rapport with key informants. These are important features of your proposed work.

Clear description of your rationale for the selection of sites is even more important if you are leaving yourself the option of changing or adding sites. In this case, discuss the circumstances under which changes would be made. If reviewers understand and approve of your thinking, they are much more likely to have confidence in you to make solid decisions as you progress through the research process.

When feasible, multiple observational sites are probably better than a single site. Comparison, whether between individuals, groups, or instances of analytic categories, for example, is basic in science. The use of multiple sites that differ in some meaningful way provides a built-in comparison that is easily explained to, and understood by, reviewers. The meaningful differences between sites should be clearly described.

Finally, how will you decide when, what, and whom to observe? Plans regarding the observational "schedule," for lack of a better term, probably come closest to what quantitative reviewers think of as sampling. For instance, if you are observing a social world that is active around the clock, describe your plans to be sure that you observe the full range of activities/events that are part of your site. You want reviewers to be confident that you will cover the full variety of relevant events/activities that take place in the setting and also that you will observe both typical and atypical activities, anticipated and unanticipated events. This demonstrates your knowledge of the site, your realization that the unexpected will happen, and your commitment to spending sufficient time in the field.

Remember that quantitative reviewers think in terms of numbers, so give them some. Telling reviewers that you will conduct observations until your categories are saturated does not tell them much. Telling reviewers that you plan to spend approximately so many hours per week, for so many weeks, doing observations is much more meaningful. Because you do not want to sacrifice flexibility for clarity, you

should include some caveats regarding decisions as to when to leave the field and how such decisions will be made. Reviewers have the job of trying to determine whether the research you propose is worthwhile and feasible, and if you are the person to do it. The more information you provide, the better able they are to make such determinations.

Interviewing

With interviews as your primary source of data, you are using a method that is familiar to quantitative researchers. This familiarity might bring certain expectations regarding sampling; you have to get past the expectation of a “representative sample.” Acknowledge that you will not achieve a representative sample, with an explanation as to why this is not your intent; reiterate your goals. It is better to “waste” two or three sentences than to have it thought that you do not understand the basics of sampling.

Keep in mind the importance of variability to quantitative researchers. Even though you will not be doing statistical analyses involving variance, the underlying concept is relevant. Perhaps your participants are in different social roles, come from diverse social backgrounds, or have had different experiences. Even though you do not know exactly where your research will take you, you do know that you want some diversity among the participants you will recruit, some of which can be built into your initial plans. Including terms such as *theoretical sampling* or *purposive sampling* will not hurt, but relying on them will. Again, details and clarity are needed. What types of participants will you try to recruit? Why? Where and how will these potential participants be sought? Provide the rationale for your plans, both conceptual and pragmatic. If you will use different avenues of recruitment to ensure, for example, ethnic diversity, explain that. For focus group interviews, if you plan to organize the groups around some characteristic of participants (e.g., gender, ethnicity, physical ailments), be sure to explain this and illustrate your access to the sorts of participants you hope to recruit.

Finally, you cannot avoid the issue of numbers. In purely practical terms, you have to have some idea of how many people you will interview in order to prepare time and financial budgets. More importantly, reviewers' impressions of the likely credibility of your work will be influenced by the number of participants you include. If reviewers see what they think is too small a number, whatever that might be, they will be negatively impressed. If they see a number that they recognize is not feasible given your resources, they will be afraid you cannot accomplish the work you propose. The number of participants you plan to interview has to make sense in the context of your research goals, the nature of the interviews, and your resources, to give a few examples. Experienced researchers can refer to their own earlier work, the numbers of participants with whom they have worked successfully in the past, to achieve estimates. Less experienced researchers might look to the literature for help in coming up with reasonable numerical goals. If you have a plan to build in diversity, you might think in terms of the number of participants of each “type” that would likely give you the data you need. As always, the goal is to show a reviewer, in terms he or she will understand, that you have a solid, well-reasoned plan that will lead to success.

DATA COLLECTION

Your description of data collection strategies must go beyond stringing together lists of technical terms. Although quantitative reviewers are sure to have some understanding of *participant observation* or *intensive interviewing*, it might not match yours and certainly will not be as rich and detailed. Moreover, because quantitative reviewers are much less likely than qualitative researchers to take a *bricoleur* (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) approach to research, any use of multiple methods must be explained.

Observations of Social Worlds

It is easy for those unfamiliar with the conduct of observational research to dismiss it as "too loose" or "not rigorous." Our unstandardized methods might appear fuzzy and haphazard. You can avoid such impressions by providing details and by demonstrating the rigor of your work.

An obvious question from reviewers is "What, exactly, is it you *do* in the field?" If you will be filling a legitimate role in the setting (formal or otherwise), describe it and explain how this role will put you in a position to make the necessary observations. If the role will limit what you can observe, acknowledge this and discuss your plans to deal with the limitations or, alternatively, their implications for your research. If you will not be filling a recognized role, explain what you expect to do and how you will involve yourself in the setting. (See Knapp, 1997, for a useful example drawn from interview research.)

Because your purpose for entering the field is data collection, explain what constitutes data and, in some detail, how you intend to record them. This is an opportunity to show the rigor of your approach. Do not say simply you will record field notes and write research memos. Is the setting one in which you can jot notes to aid your memory? If so, say it. If you have done observational research before, you can estimate the time to be devoted to field notes (e.g., so many hours writing notes per so many hours in the field). If you will write field notes immediately on leaving the field, say so. If you tape-record your field notes, do you later transcribe them or work from the tapes? In addition to providing your plans in some detail, this demonstrates your knowledge of the resources (time, equipment, assistance, etc.) required for the project. Assuming you will be doing analysis simultaneously with data collection, explain this and the effect it will have on data collection. These details, in combination with the estimate of time to be spent in the field, show clearly that it is "real research" you are proposing.

Interviewing

Interviewing covers a multitude of specific techniques. Simply naming your technique will not be of much help to reviewers. Use the labels you find meaningful, but do not stop there. For instance, are your questions designed to stimulate talk, provoke thought, or elicit specific pieces of information? (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, provide a nice discussion of the types of things participants give us in interviews.) How directive or nondirective do you plan to be? How will you use probes? Include a few

sample questions and an estimate of how long you expect interviews to last, so reviewers can get a feel for what you plan to do.

How do you plan to record your interview data? Audiotaping probably will not be questioned and can be explained in a phrase (e.g., “to capture participants’ answers in their own words”). Similarly, a statement that tapes will be transcribed verbatim is quite clear. On the other hand, the use of field notes, because they do not provide a verbatim record, will have to be justified. There are a number of reasons you might choose to use this approach (logistics of the setting, sensitivity of the subject matter, cost of transcribing, etc.), so simply explain your reasoning.

Videotaping raises two major concerns. The first of these is obtrusiveness. Explain why this will not be an issue or how you will overcome it. The second issue is transcribing. What will you transcribe and how? If you plan to deal with facial expression, gesture, and that sort of thing, explain your transcription in detail. There is a long history of studying such behavior quantitatively, which can lead to expectations that are foreign to your goals.

Furthermore, you are likely to change your interview questions to reflect your ongoing data analysis. This must be explained to quantitative reviewers, who are accustomed to standardized interviews.

If you will use focus group interviews, a bit more information is necessary. How will you ensure that all members of the groups participate? A key feature of focus groups is the mutual influence of participants, which can be a strength or weakness, depending on your goals (Madriz, 1998; Morgan, 1988). If it is group interaction you are after, this is easily explained. But if your decision to use focus groups is primarily pragmatic (more participants in less time) or a way to get “into” a phenomenon about which you know little, this warrants discussion. Finally, there is the question of depth (Belgrave & Smith, 1995). If there is one thing quantitative reviewers understand quite well, it is numbers. It will be obvious to them that a 2-hour interview with between six and eight participants cannot be as in-depth as even 1-hour interviews with individual participants. If your research question calls for depth, you will have to address this issue, specifying your rationale.

Combination Methods

Quantitative reviewers are likely to think of the use of multiple methods in terms of triangulation for purposes of validity. Thus, although they understand this approach differently than we do, they appreciate it as valuable, and this is a strength. If you are using multiple methods, you will want to emphasize this. Beyond describing each method to be used, explain the nature of the data you hope to collect via each one, the ways in which these types of data are expected to complement each other, and how they will enrich your eventual understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

DATA ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION, AND OBJECTIVITY

If our strategies for selecting research participants and collecting data are somewhat unfamiliar to quantitative reviewers, our means of analyzing data verge on the

incomprehensible. Our tendency to romanticize this process does not help. Quite frankly, to tell a quantitative reviewer that “categories will emerge from the data” or that you “will develop themes” is to tell him or her virtually nothing.

Emergence of Categories

How can you explain a process that is so unstandardized, so dependent on interpretation and insight? Avoid the temptation to call this “measurement.” That term carries a lot of baggage and sets up expectations of standardized scales. First, reflect on how you have actually worked with similar data in the past. If you read and reread (and reread) your field notes or transcriptions, say so. Do you look for different people to use the same language or to spontaneously raise similar issues, as clues that there is “something going on”? Do you have some preliminary categories that you anticipate? (This latter is not “purely” inductive, but it is real and gives reviewers something to sink their teeth into. Also, making your expectations explicit helps you with your inductive work, as you “keep an eye on” yourself.) Does seeing the unexpected raise your eyebrows? To the extent that you can, explain concretely how you go about finding categories.

Second, describe your coding practices. Do you code by lines, sentences, paragraphs, events, or what? Do you scribble in margins, use colored pencils and highlighters, do everything electronically? Will you be doing all the coding alone, or do you have a research team that will be able to discuss multiple codings of the same data? Tell what you do and how you do it. If you will be using a computer package for coding or other aspects of analysis, explain how the package will be used (see below).

Interpretation

There is no point in beating around this particular bush: We rely on interpretation. This is the point of our work. It is far better to raise this issue yourself, in your terms, than to have your work dismissed as “not objective” by a reviewer who uses a very different paradigm. There is no reason to be apologetic or aggressive. Simply acknowledge your reliance on interpretation and explain its value for your research goals. Although a citation or two regarding the legitimacy of this approach will not hurt, it is up to you to show that your approach is the most reasonable one for achieving your goals. You do not want to distract your reader with an abstract, philosophical discussion or offend him or her with a didactic tone, so stay focused on your work.

Beyond Categories and Coding

Once we get beyond developing categories and coding schemes, the description of data analysis becomes more complicated and difficult. If you are using one of the “standardized” approaches to analysis (e.g., Spradley, 1980, or Miles & Huberman, 1984), you will have some concrete procedures to describe and can even provide a sample layout of a worksheet or flowchart or some such thing. Whether you have specific procedures to talk about or must try to describe a process that you have

never explicated before, the key is clarity. You want to let the reviewer know what you plan to do, to bring him or her at least a superficial “vicarious experience” of qualitative data analysis. Rather than getting caught up in such labels as “themes” or “metacategories,” show how different aspects of your analysis are related to each other. Write of your comparisons across sites, across events or participants, or over levels of analysis, for example. Explain as simply, concretely, and clearly as possible how you will proceed with your analysis. You want this section of your proposal to be meaningful to someone who has never done this sort of work.

Computer Packages

The use of packages is something quantitative researchers are quite comfortable with and have come to expect. Your task is to explain the use of computer assistance in your particular data analysis without having your readers tap into their preconceptions of statistical analysis of quantitative data. Tesch (1991a, 1991b) provides extensive discussion that can help explain the capabilities of computer-assisted analysis. Richards and Richards (1994) give a comprehensive overview of the potential and limitations of using computer assistance through various steps of the analytic process. Weitzman and Miles (1995) introduce the reader to 24 programs by clustering them around their capabilities, and Weitzman (2000) offers help with software selection. Do not simply drop the name of a computer package into your proposal; use resources such as these to help you expand the description of your data analysis and to show the possibilities of qualitative data. A computer package can serve as a “hook” to pull quantitative readers into the world of qualitative data analysis; once you have them there, you can more easily show them that world.

Credibility/Validity

This is, in a sense, the whole point of carefully explaining your research strategies. Although investigators do not typically address the issue of validity explicitly and the issue itself is controversial (e.g., Bochner, 2000; Richardson, 2000), a well-written description of a sound research plan should convince a reviewer that your work has a strong potential to yield credible findings. However, if your research is such that it presents special problems in terms of credibility (e.g., a study of a secretive social world) or if you are planning to do something that is particularly intended to strengthen credibility/validity (e.g., multiple methods), you will want to deal with this explicitly in your proposal.

CONCLUSIONS

As health researchers, we are turning more to inductive, qualitative research techniques as we pursue little-studied phenomena. This puts us in position to do new, cutting-edge research. We have opportunities to win funding to conduct our research. To disseminate our work beyond those who share our methods holds great promise for enriching the larger health sciences discourses. To take advantage of these opportunities, we must be able to talk about our work in ways that others can understand.

Our goal has been to explain some areas of our work that might not be understood by readers and reviewers without a qualitative background, with suggestions on how to communicate past this potential barrier. The continual themes of those suggestions are the provision of details and the explicit tying of methodological strategies to research goals and results. If someone were to follow all the advice given above in detail, his or her methods section would go well beyond the page limitations of any venue and try the patience of any audience. As with any writing, we have to choose what to emphasize and where to provide detail. These choices depend on what we are writing, on our specific research problem and strategies, and on our audience.

Qualitatively oriented health researchers are doing a lot of truly exciting work. It is important that we write and talk about our work clearly, so that others can see what we want to do, understand what we have done, and use what we have learned. Together we and our audience will take the state of knowledge to the next stage.

NOTES

1. The terms grant application and research proposal are used synonymously for the purpose of this article.
2. We thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this issue.
3. For those qualitative approaches that do not require a literature review before the research is conducted, much of this section will be more applicable in the "Discussion" section of research reports.

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