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# Mission Drift In Qualitative Research, Or Moving Toward A Systematic Review Of Qualitative Studies, Moving Back To A More Systematic Narrative Review

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### **Abstract**

The paper argues that the systematic review of qualitative research is best served by reliance upon qualitative methods themselves. A case is made for strengthening the narrative literature review and using narrative itself as a method of review. A technique is proposed that builds upon recent developments in qualitative systematic review by the use of a narrative inductive method of analysis. The essence of qualitative work is described. The natural ability for issues of ethnicity and diversity to be investigated through a qualitative approach is elaborated. Recent developments in systematic review are delineated, including the Delphi and Signal and Noise techniques, inclusion of grey literature, scoping studies and meta-ethnography. A narrative inductive interpretive method to review qualitative research is proposed, using reflective teams to analyse documents. Narrative is suggested as a knowledge-generating method and its underlying hermeneutic approach is defended as providing validity and theoretical structure. Finally, qualities that distinguish qualitative research from more quantitative investigations are delineated. Starting points for reflecting on qualitative studies and their usefulness are listed.

### **Keywords**

Qualitative Systematic Review, Evidence-Based Policy, Grey Literature, Scoping Studies, Delphi, 'Signal and Noise', Meta-ethnography, Narrative Review, Narrative Method, and Reflective Teams

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# **Mission Drift in Qualitative Research, or Moving Toward a Systematic Review of Qualitative Studies, Moving Back to a More Systematic Narrative Review**

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*The paper argues that the systematic review of qualitative research is best served by reliance upon qualitative methods themselves. A case is made for strengthening the narrative literature review and using narrative itself as a method of review. A technique is proposed that builds upon recent developments in qualitative systematic review by the use of a narrative inductive method of analysis. The essence of qualitative work is described. The natural ability for issues of ethnicity and diversity to be investigated through a qualitative approach is elaborated. Recent developments in systematic review are delineated, including the Delphi and Signal and Noise techniques, inclusion of grey literature, scoping studies and meta-ethnography. A narrative inductive interpretive method to review qualitative research is proposed, using reflective teams to analyse documents. Narrative is suggested as a knowledge-generating method and its underlying hermeneutic approach is defended as providing validity and theoretical structure. Finally, qualities that distinguish qualitative research from more quantitative investigations are delineated. Starting points for reflecting on qualitative studies and their usefulness are listed. Key words: Qualitative Systematic Review, Evidence-Based Policy, Grey Literature, Scoping Studies, Delphi, 'Signal and Noise', Meta-ethnography, Narrative Review, Narrative Method, and Reflective Teams*

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## **Introduction**

Qualitative research is no longer the poor stepchild of quantitative inquiries. Over the past ten years, qualitative research has come into its own, particularly in terms of wider acceptance in academic and policy communities. At the same time, evidence-based medicine (or EBM—'a politically correct term') has given birth to the systematic review with all of its complexities and conundrums. Some, however, have begun to question the systematic review approach and its appropriateness, particularly in the generation of evidence-based policy (Packwood, 2002, p. 268), and its usefulness in reviewing qualitative studies continues to be debated. Nonetheless, because qualitative research is now ignored at peril within the systematic review camp, such reviews have become the proving ground for qualitative work as well as the quantitative study. A mistake is often made, however, in transposing methods best suited to systematic review of quantitative studies into qualitative ones. Check-lists, 'standards', matrices, 'hierarchies of evidence' and other terminology borrowed from the arsenal of the quantitative camp pepper qualitative ground like so many cluster bombs; therein lies the danger of the loss of much of the ground that qualitative

research has won over the past decade or so. It is my belief that this rush to imitate quantitative procedures is producing a kind of ‘mission drift’ in many qualitative ‘systematic’ research reviews.

‘Systematic’ is, by definition, ‘a system, plan, or organized method’ (Oxford English Dictionary [OED]), ‘methodical in procedure or plan’ (Merriam-Webster). If a systematic review is then, at least in part, about method itself, then qualitative methods include valid principles and procedures with which to progress in reviewing literature ‘systematically’. A wide range of qualitative ‘methodical’ approaches are, therefore, available to perform or carry out a review in a particular field of interest—‘systematically and meticulously’ (OED). The time has come when it may be best to reacquaint ourselves with the adage that ‘the hallmark of good qualitative methodology is its flexibility rather than its standardisation’ (Popay, Rogers & Williams, 1998, p. 346).

It is widely assumed that the ‘systematic review’ is the ‘gold standard’ of the Evidence Based Policy Movement (Young, Ashby, Boaz, & Grayson, 2002, p. 216). Systematic review protocol now routinely states that the narrative approach (one of many qualitative methods) to literature review is passé, dead, simplistic and, above all, unsystematic. On the other hand, the use of narrative in the social sciences is nowadays heralded as a *fait accompli* (Denzin, 2001, p. 23). This paper will make the case that narrative is the bread and butter of qualitative work, that qualitative research is always about story reporting and story making and that narrative is a democratising factor in social science research as it should be in evidence review as well. Supporting this, Dixon-Woods, Fitzpatrick and Roberts point to the fact that ‘qualitative data take the form of narrative, with themes and concepts as the analytical device’ (Dixon-Woods et al., 2001, p. 126). By supporting a narrative review that incorporates some of the more revitalizing methodological procedures emerging from the systematic review arena, the toolkit of the evidence-based policy movement is expanded, enhanced and enriched.

A system of narrative review and analysis of qualitative research will be proposed in this paper that utilises and builds upon some of the more democratising techniques that are emerging within qualitative systematic review (Delphi and Nominal group techniques of iterative consensus-building, inclusion of grey literature in reviews, scoping studies, meta-ethnography and ‘signal and noise’ method—revised as a qualitative tool) and combines them with a rigorous, inductive narrative analysis method. The technique involves the use of reflective teams to analyse qualitative data and is based upon a narrative interpretive method (Jones, 2003), combined with classic concepts of the utility of case study (Yin, 1989). This interpretive/analytic procedure includes moving well beyond the widespread tendency in qualitative research to fragment data by using code and retrieve methods.

By such a return to and emphasis on the very nature of qualitative methods, the systematic review of qualitative studies gains credence and applicability in the systematic review arena. In fact, Dixon-Woods et al remind us, ‘Most of the ways in which qualitative research could be used in systematic reviews are logical extensions to existing uses of qualitative methods in primary research’ (Dixon-Woods et al., 2001, p. 128). In the end, research synthesis encompasses a process of theory development and creation of a holistic interpretation (Kirkevold [1997] cited in Raholm, Lindholm, & Eriksson, 2002, p. 5), a stronghold of qualitative research.

My own primary research takes a biographic narrative approach to social health issues, using in-depth, unstructured participant interviews (for example, Jones, 2002c). Through such an approach, I am able to uncover the possibilities of

meanings behind health events at the individual and family levels, thus illuminating the social contexts of health, ill health and care giving. The method's reflective team analyses are conducted within the framework of the psychosocial, but not reducible to simple psychology; rather, case studies are considered as "complex responses to events and people in the social world, both past and present" (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p. 24). Through this team approach to analysis, the investigator and reflective teams remain transparent and active participants in the story (re)telling. The stories (re)created in the analyses echo cultural resources at every level reflected through the narrator, the interviewer-writer and the analyses team members (and later, the reader).

Of particular interest to me in my current endeavours and my colleagues at the Centre for Evidence in Ethnicity, Health & Diversity (CEEHD [[http://users.wbs.ac.uk/group/ceehd/home/ceehd\\_home](http://users.wbs.ac.uk/group/ceehd/home/ceehd_home)] —based at Warwick and De Montfort Universities in the UK), one of nine nodes connected through the UK ESRC Centre for Evidence Network (<http://www.evidencenetwork.org/>), is the potential for qualitative reviews to unearth and report minority experience and viewpoints in healthcare studies. The philosophical underpinnings of our work, therefore, support our efforts to first deconstruct, then expand and enrich the concepts of 'systematic' and 'evidence-based review' as well as the term 'diversity'. It is our purpose to champion diversity itself as an approach to systematic and/or evidence-based review of qualitative studies. Through this process, our aim is to make meaningful the voices of a wide range of often-overlooked and undervalued minority healthcare consumers in healthcare policy and practice circles in Britain.

One of the virtues of qualitative research is its inclusionary nature and ability to give service-users a voice, both through the research process itself (for example, through a wide range of qualitative social science practices that include participatory action research, in-depth interviewing, ethnographic studies, visual anthropology, biographic narrative studies and so forth) and in reports, documents and presentations. The importance of this kind of research cannot be overemphasised, particularly when dealing with the disadvantaged and/or the unheard voice. Calasanti elaborates: 'Incorporating diversity involves more than content or comparison. ... it also involves theorising about underlying relations. ... Merely positing that the experiences of a racial/ethnic group are "different" places them in the category of "other"—a special "deviant" case—with the dominant group serving as the often unacknowledged "norm"' (Calasanti, 1996, p. 148).

By use of a variety of qualitative methods, both in research, analysis and review, the richness of human experience and the voice of the 'other' is finally given a full hearing. For example, the move to a user-led approach to health studies where participants or their representatives are involved in the design, conduct, analysis and reporting of research (as in Participatory Action Research) has beneficial effects on research itself, making it more sensitive to the interests of service-users (Johnson, 2003, p. 13). Qualitative research has the potential to contribute to such paradigm changes dramatically, particularly in the field of health, healthcare policy and service provision.

Indeed, we find that the storied nature of health and health information can be harnessed to benefit community health awareness programmes. The interface of cultures within our contemporary society includes the interface between specific population groups and an additional culture, the medico-social establishment and its subsets. By its nature, therefore, health and social service use is always comprised of an interface of cultures.

A social model of health care begins by listening to the stories of healthcare consumers. Such stories attempt to integrate the narrator's health event within his/her individual and unique past. A reflective team's analysis of such a story interweaves "the psychological with the social and historical, by analysing not just pathology but also strengths and adaptive capacities, and by studying formative influences not just in childhood but throughout the life span" (Runyan, 1982, p. 209). A social model of healthcare is, therefore, necessary in order to begin to comprehend the diversity and pluralities of understanding around social health events and potential service usage. By embracing a social model of healthcare with its inherent narrativity, rather than a rigid and regimented medical model, opportunities can be presented for understanding of 'others' through narrated self-knowledge, reflective practise and acknowledgement of the shared habitus (Jones, 2002a).

### **What is the Essence of Qualitative Research?**

In qualitative research, the tyranny of numbers is abandoned for the enigma of words. It is often seen as rooted in a non-tangible domain, fundamentally experiential and intuitive.

Qualitative work is in constant, dynamic flux, but moving toward some end-point in an evolutionary way. There are efforts by the mind to concretise meaning and the qualitative dimension has an integrative function for the researcher. Unity provides context and meaning and it is toward such unity that the researcher is striving. Qualitative efforts make use of that part of the person concerned with meaning, truth, purpose or reality—the ultimate significance of things. (Hiatt, 1986, p. 737)

Not mere exercises in truth or falsehood, however, these investigations are polyvocal attempts at interfacing with cultural/relational/linguistic accounts of the real. They are, therefore, interpretations and not truths in the positivistic sense. The potential of intuition is ultimately a great advantage to this very process (Scheff, 1997, p. 33-36).

### **Recent Developments in the Systematic Review of Qualitative Research**

The following are but several examples of recent developments (and expansions upon older ideas) that offer promise for more inclusionary and diverse ways of observing, organising and classifying qualitative evidence in the social sciences. Some are chosen because they directly relate to techniques such as participatory action research (Delphi, Nominal Group, Stakeholder consultation) while others are singled out for their innovative manipulation of data within a philosophy of inclusiveness (Signal & Noise) or the interpretive (hermeneutic) potential of the technique for combining studies that is akin to methods of analysing primary qualitative data (Meta-ethnography).

The Delphi technique is a consensus-building method of evidence review and considers evidence from a wider range of study types than is the case in statistical reviews (Jones & Hunter in Pope & Mays, 2002).

The Delphi process is a way of structuring communication among a group of people in order to get their opinions, offer feedback, and offer

insights about a course of action. It is not an opinion poll, because it involves multiple rounds of communication where the results of the first survey are fed back to the participants, who can then change their minds (or not) in the next round. Also, the items in a Delphi survey can go beyond questions about preferences to ask about such issues as the importance, desirability, feasibility, or potential impact of choosing a particular course of action. The technique is usually used to obtain consensus from a group of experts or to assist in forecasting. However, the group may not reach a consensus, but rather delineate different courses of action. (Freeman, Strong, Barker, & Haight-Liotta, 1996)

The process, developed by the Rand Corporation, involves assembling panels of experts (who never physically meet thus supposedly avoiding personality conflicts), ranking and re-ranking statements submitted to them by questionnaire. Respondents also are asked to rate the confidence of certainly with which they express opinions.

The 'Nominal Group' technique (a physical gathering of participants—unlike the communication process in Delphi technique by questionnaire), on the other hand, works more closely with a brain-storming technique, but also includes private ranking of ideas and tabulation (Pope & Mays, 1996). Pope and Mays caution, 'Consensus methods, in particular Delphi, have been described as methods of "last resort"'. Even their advocates have warned against overselling them and suggest that they should be regarded more as methods for structuring group communication on a question, than as a means for providing definitive answers' (Pope & Mays, 1996).

'Signal and Noise' technique involves systematic literature review inclusion/exclusion criteria employing qualitative meta-synthesis and quantitative meta-analysis. The qualitative meta-synthesis is based on themes, interventions and results, but without attempting to combine the data into one variable. A 'signal score' is used to assess the relevance of publications. What is useful in this technique is the fact that the process does not eliminate research simply because it is not at a certain level of evidence or if it has certain methodological weaknesses. 'There may be some articles in which the design is suspect (high "noise" level) but the findings appear important (strong "signal")' (Higginson, Finlay, Goodwin, Cook, Hood, Edwards, Douglas, & Norman, 2002, p. 99). The author's base signal score on such areas as study relevance, study implementation and study value to a UK audience, using a quasi Likert-type scale. In this way, there is more of a reliance on the intuitive input and knowledge of the investigators. One of the subtleties allowed for using such a scoring system is in its value to a UK audience, for example. Many reviews will automatically eliminate US studies, for instance, as irrelevant to a UK study. Using signal and noise, criteria can be considered on several levels simultaneously. Studies that 'automatically' would be eliminated in other reviews can be included in the signal and noise system.

Grey literature and its inclusion in systematic review is the singularly most important contribution to the democratisation of the evidence-based movement. Grey literature is non-conventional, fugitive, and sometimes ephemeral but, by its nature, often more inclusionary than standard, peer-reviewed and commercially published work. For example, reports published by small issue-centric, voluntary organisations can often make the case for service-users more directly and convincingly than larger academic studies of the same issues. Reviews and assessments by government departments and agencies also contribute to the utility of grey literature. This literature becomes particularly crucial to investigations such as the ones that we are

conducting at the Centre for Evidence in Ethnicity, Health & Diversity. 'Social science publishing is considerably more fragmented than is some scientific disciplines, where peer-reviewed journal literature is the norm' (Young et al., 2002, p. 222). Grey literature is comprised of the literature that is not found in peer reviewed journals and is made up of practitioner journal literature, conference papers, books, literature from a range of public, private and voluntary sector bodies, and government publications. A major effort in democratising the evidence-based movement is the inclusion of grey literature in assessing the state-of-the-art in social science fields of inquiry. Increasingly, this information is internet-based, confounding the more traditional search approach of peer reviewed literature. Nonetheless, developments such as the SIGLE (System for Information on Grey Literature) database, produced by the European Association for Grey Literature, available on CD through SilverPlatter Information Ltd. (<http://www.ovid.com/site/index.jsp>), are becoming more common.

Scoping Studies are devices by which the 'scope' and aim of a proposed study are investigated. Traditionally, the scoping study uses a mix of literature review (with a particular purpose of uncovering previous systematic reviews in the field under study) and stakeholder consultation. In a typical quantitative systematic review, the preliminary searching (scoping) is usually carried out to validate these initial questions:

- What is the size of the candidate literature review?
- What is the likely quality of the literature (e.g., are RCTs common or rare)?
- What are the specific issues with regard to terminology (i.e., definitions or indexing)?
- Which databases are likely to provide the highest yield of relevant items?
- What is the review likely to cost? (Booth & Fry-Smith, 2003)

Booth and Fry-Smith (2003) follow up in this approach with 'refinement in discussion with researchers', but do not mention other consultation, for instance, with service-users or their representatives.

Stakeholder consultation is a process that typically emanates from governmental policy consultations (Scottish Executive 2001, 'Scoping study for a national survey of Scotland's minority ethnic populations,' available at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/cru/kd01/red/minethnic-03.asp>), but a method that is now being employed more regularly in researcher-led investigations. In 'Eliciting the user's views of the processes of health care' (Nicholson, 2000) a call is made for user consultation, development of consensus, an inclusionary research process and efforts made to reach and elicit the views of hard-to-reach or marginalized groups. Nicholson calls for doing this through qualitative methods sensitive to needs and experiences of these groups and incorporating the marginalized into the mainstream, rather than treating them as special interest groups (Nicholson, 2000, p. 9).

In the Scottish Executive's scoping study, emergent issues that impact on the methodological and practical issues of study design are fore fronted. These are too numerous to raise here, except to comment that 'during the consultation process, a number of research questions were raised which people thought were important in enabling the understanding of ethnic minority experiences but which they felt were essentially qualitative issues and would be explored most effectively through focus



group research or in-depth interviews' (Scottish Executive, 2001). Particular mention was made, on several occasions throughout the document, of 'the need for engaging with the community under study to ensure that research represents the views of minority ethnic communities and involvement in the research process throughout the research process' (Scottish Executive, 2001).

Meta-ethnography was developed as a systematic review process by US educators, George Noblit and Dwight Hare (Noblit & Hare, 1988). Meta-ethnography is a comparative textual analysis of field studies, using three ways to order them: in terms of one another, set against one another or tied to one another. The premise is based in the assumption that there is always a social and theoretical context in which substantive findings emerge; the recovery of this context is the aim of meta-ethnography (Noblit & Hare, 1988, p. 5-6). Meta-ethnography is driven by interpretation, not analysis, and is seen as an alternative to the positivist paradigm. Using such tools as key metaphors, analogy, reflexivity and ritual, this inductive and interpretive form of knowledge synthesis has much in common with anthropology and sociology. Importantly, an interpretation enables the reader to translate the case studied into her/his own social understanding (1988, p. 18). It consists of a process of 'like-with-like' comparison, in that it translates qualitative studies into one another, while remembering that the translator is always translating studies into his own world view (1988, p. 25). Importantly, Noblit and Hare support case study criteria: 'Unless there is some substantive reason for an exhaustive search, generalizing from all studies of a particular setting yields trite conclusions' (1988, p. 28).

By updating and expanding upon Noblit and Hare's foundational work, meta-ethnography is now beginning to gain ground in the field of systematic review in the UK (Britten, Campbell, Pope, Donovan, Morgan & Pill 2002; Campbell, Pound, Pope, Britten, Pill, Morgan, & Donovan, 2003). The authors champion the interpretive framework of meta-ethnography as a technique for combining studies that is akin to the methods of analysing primary qualitative data (Britten et al., 2002, p. 214). They see the approach 'as perhaps the best developed method for synthesising qualitative data, and one which clearly had its origins in the interpretivist paradigm from which most methods of primary qualitative research evolved' (Campbell et al., 2003, p. 673).

The EPPI (Evidence for Policy and Practice Information) Centre in the Social Science Research Unit at the Institute of Education, University of London, has developed streams of work both in reviews on health promotion as well as education (Gough & Elbourne, 2002, p. 229). In contrast to more traditional reviews (such as those conducted by the Cochrane Collaboration and the Campbell Collaboration), the EPPI Centre also addresses wider questions using what it calls 'systematic narrative reviews' (Gough & Elbourne, 2002, p. 229). Central to this approach is user involvement, including involvement of service-users in the setting of the research question of what needs to be known.

Like Britten et al. (2002), Gough and Elbourne build upon the early pioneering work of American educationalists, Noblitt and Hare (1988) and their concept of meta-ethnography. Gough and Elbourne propose a narrative review that includes defining and developing the discourse to be addressed, a synthesis that needs to be in the form of new interpretative constructions rather than generalisations, and a qualitative case study approach where the primary qualitative studies are the case studies. The authors explain that 'a meta-ethnography must be driven by the need to construct adequate interpretive explanations,' that 'each interpretive qualitative research review will be likely to develop its own specific interpretation' and that the

‘success of each review is the contribution to human discourse rather than the review itself’ (Gough & Elbourne, 2002, p. 233).

The promise of an ethnographic approach to the systematic review of qualitative studies is found in its foundational concepts that privilege alternative ways of thinking, knowing and viewing the world. These concepts become especially poignant in work where concepts of culture, population, identity, the study site and researcher stance move to the forefront, as they do in any consideration of ethnicity and diversity. ‘Traditional postures used by researchers must be revised to conform to realities of contemporary technological, global and multicultural, racial and linguistic existence’. (LeCompte, 2002, p. 283)

Table 1. **Examples of Qualitative Review Techniques.**

<b>Method</b>	<b>Data Collection</b>	<b>Analysis</b>	<b>Benefits</b>
<b>Delphi</b>	Consensus building	Inductive	Reflective; avoids personality conflicts
<b>Nominal</b>	Brainstorming & ranking	Inductive	Physical gathering encourages contributions
<b>Signal &amp; Noise</b>	Documents and literature	Intuitive; value-based	Simultaneous consideration of criteria
<b>Grey literature</b>	Alternative documents; web based literature, etc.	Can be analysed inductively or deductively	Uncovers under-used resources and voices
<b>Scoping</b>	Literature & stakeholders	Consultative, intuitive consensus building approach	Produces overview in short timeframe
<b>Meta-ethnography</b>	Like-with-like comparisons; case study method	Comparative, textural, interpretive	Alternative to positivist paradigm; allows for further interpretation

### **A Proposed Way Forward for (Systematic) Narrative Reviews of Qualitative Studies**

A narrative interpretive method of systematic review of qualitative literature is proposed that both extends and consolidates these developments (see Table 1) in evidence based reviews. The method builds upon the data gathering qualities of these techniques (consensus building, brainstorming, anonymity) and the benefits of inductive analysis (consultative, intuitive, comparative, textural and interpretive). The narrative method’s foundation is based in the use of analytic induction through the technique of reflective teams to interpret and respond to qualitative data in a case study setting (for an elaboration on the reflective team approach, see Jones, 2003). What is involved in this approach is a kind of synthesis involving a more inductive approach in which the reviewer(s) may reformulate the focus of the review in the course of doing it (Hammersley, 2003, p. 4). By employing inductive analysis and using a ‘reflecting team’ approach to interpretation, the introduction of multiple

voices is facilitated, unsettling and creating a mix of meaning and encouraging communication and collective means of deliberation (Gergen, 2000, p. 4). What is sought in using this procedure is an opening up of the possibilities in interpretation, rather than relying solely upon one researcher's (or, in fact, one homogeneous team of researcher's) interpretation of the data at hand.

This method is envisaged as an approach to the systematic review of qualitative documents that will counteract the current tendency to 'vet' papers for inclusion in reviews through a checklist of criteria and open up the dialogue on synthesis to include not only researchers, service providers and policymakers, but service users as well. In fact, the abilities required of this method's analysis group participants are openness and creativity/imagination rather than knowledge of specific research methods or fields of practice. Diversity of approach to the material (facilitated greatly by the actual diversity of participants) should be solicited and encouraged. In using this method in my primary research on informal care (Jones, 2002c), for example, a mix of participant backgrounds and a social health approach encouraged even the most reluctant academic participants to engage in dialogue on the level of the personal and the social, thus contributing greatly to the analytical process.

The team-building process begins by recruiting participants (two, three or more per team) from varying backgrounds (professionally as well as demographically) to be immersed in the selected literature, at times 'line by line' and hypothesise at each new revelation of dialogic material. Each bit of material can then be included or discarded for further hypothesis testing later in the process. What is sought in using this procedure is an opening up of the possibilities in interpretation, rather than relying solely upon the primary researcher's interpretation of the materials.

The following is not a checklist of criteria for the teams, but rather, starting points for reflecting on qualitative studies and their usefulness (Jones, 2002b).

1. How are the studies transparent and dialogical? Where is (are) the study's researcher(s) coming from? What are the backgrounds, prejudices and beliefs? (Professional as well as personal; e.g., gender, ethnicity, age, etc.) How are these limitations? In what way are these revealed?
2. How thoroughly is the research process described? Does the narrative include roadblocks, false steps, etc. described in a helpful way?
3. How are groups and individuals studied included in the larger research process? How are they involved in the research design? How are direct benefits to research participants included?
4. In what way is attention paid to the wider cultural context? For example, is the study of a minority group (age, ethnicity, class, etc) placed in context with the larger culture ('dominant' culture, majority, other age groups [e.g., youth/older people])?
5. How is the study presented as a narrative? How does the writing take the reader on a journey? Is it dialogical?
6. Is dissemination, more generally, part of the research design? How is feedback from both participants and the wider community included in the design and dissemination?
7. What are the main metaphors? How are they productive, engaging and explanatory? What specific attention is given to language and the construction of realities by use of language?

8. What are the studies bases in philosophical and theoretical ground? Are they transparent from the start?

9. How are ethical issues clearly delineated?

Many of the proposed and emerging standards for quality in interpretive social science are also standards for ethics (Lincoln, 1995, p. 286). Lincoln discusses several issues in qualitative research that enlarge the debate about standards:

- Problems of the face to face encounter
- The virtual impossibility of maintaining anonymity under some circumstances
- Selecting and excluding material to be included in case study
- Open and honest negotiations around data collection, analysis and presentation. (1995, p. 287)

10. Is it useful?

In what imaginative ways might the study contribute to both a body of knowledge and society?

The abilities required of group participants are openness and creativity/imagination rather than knowledge of specific research methods or even fields under review. In fact, diversity of approach to the material should be solicited and encouraged. "The value of the panel of analysts and of peer review lies in part in the capacity of different researchers to have anxieties that are different from those of each other ..." (Wengraf in Chamberlayne, Bornat & Wengraf, 2000, p. 144) and from that of the original author.

### **What is Narrative?**

Freeman proposes narrative as a way of ordering the 'landscape of events' (Freeman, 1984, p. 7). 'The fact that particular forms of knowledge derive from retrospection, from an essentially backward look over the terrain of experience, is an irreducible "peculiarity" of the human being' (1984, p. 9). Freeman views the structure of the narrative as representing the imposition of a continuous account upon discontinuous data (1984, p. 10). For example, Hunter (in Mishler, 1995) reminds us that medicine is filled with stories and is, in fact, dependent on narrative, is essentially case-based knowledge and practice and that clinical judgement is 'fundamentally interpretative' (1995, p. 112-113). Greenhalgh proposes: 'Appreciating the narrative nature of illness experience and the intuitive and subjective aspects of clinical method does not require us to reject the principles of evidence based medicine' (Greenhalgh, 1999, p. 325). Harré concludes:

It is an essential characteristic of narrative to be a highly sensitive guide to the variable and fleeting nature of human reality because it is, in part, constitutive of it. This makes it such an important subject of inquiry for the human sciences in general. . . Narratives are both models of threshold and models of the self. It is through our stories that we construct ourselves as part of our world. (Harré, 1997, p. 278-79)

By adopting a narrative rather than an empirical mode of inquiry, we allow reviewers to get closer to the phenomena studied in several ways. First, the narrative provides access to the specific rather than the abstract; secondly, narratives allows

experience to unfold in a temporal way; thirdly, everyday language and its nuances are encouraged; finally, narrative allows personal dynamics to reveal themselves in the actions and relationships presented as well as the reviewers response to them (Chesla, 1995, p. 73). It is important to remember that even the most quantitative of us still approach work with the 'hidden agenda', if you will, of our background, culture, experience, preferences and prejudices. Part of being post modern in our approaches includes acknowledging as much of these things as possible and being vigilant in discovering the more hidden ones. By clearing the air in this way, we not only can attempt to produce more transparent data, but also can often find keys to understanding that we may have otherwise overlooked.

In considering a narrative approach, we arrive at the hermeneutic. Gergen (1997) proposes, 'Hermeneutical deliberations serve the valuable function of thwarting the modes of depersonalisation so common to the empirical research tradition' (1997, p. 6). 'Essentially, the task of interpretation necessitates critical self-reflection for there to be validity, a respect for the autonomy of the text' (Freeman, 1984, p. 12). The data itself, therefore, becomes the ultimate reference with its 'seeming refusal to fit into tightly sealed categories or schematisms' (1984, p. 14), as is the nature of so many quantitative approaches to systematic review. 'Misguided efforts to verify findings (for example, the use of test-retest and inter-rater reliability kinds of measures) suggest a misplaced preoccupation with empirical rather than narrative standards of truth and a profound lack of understanding of the temporal and liminal nature and vital meaning-making functions of storytelling' (Sandelowski, 1991, p. 165).

### **What is Analytic Induction?**

Analytic induction represents the bedrock 'from which Glaser and Strauss's work on grounded theory derives' (Chalip in White, Chalip, & Marshall, 1998, p. 3) and was first described by the sociologist Florian Znaniecki in 1934 (Ratcliff, 2001, p. 1; Robinson, 1951, p. 812). In the late teens of the last century, F. Znaniecki developed the research-technique known as the analysis of human documents (letters, memoirs, life histories and so forth) with the seminal work, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (1918-1920; with W. I. Thomas, 1958). This approach to life and lived experience was later defined as the autobiographical method in sociology and located in the theory of symbolic interactionism (Plummer, 1983, p. 40). Znaniecki was a member of faculty at the University of Chicago at the time when its Department of Sociology –the first of its kind in the U.S.—was known as 'the Chicago School.' 'It was the first American university to establish an original collective school of thought: pragmatism' (Plummer, 1983, p. 51).

Znaniecki held that analytic induction is the true method of the physical and biological sciences, and that it ought to be the method of the social sciences too (Znaniecki cited in Robinson, 1951, p. 812). Inductive rather than deductive reasoning is involved, allowing for modification of concepts and relationships between concepts. The process occurs throughout the action of doing research with the goal of most accurately representing the reality of the situation. No analysis is considered final, since reality is constantly changing. The emphasis in analytic induction is on the whole, even though elements and the relationships between elements are analysed. A specific case need not necessarily be 'average' or representative of the general phenomena studied. It is crucial, nonetheless, that a case

has essential characteristics and that it function as a pattern by which future cases can be defined (1951, p. 1).

In 1950, Cressey summarised Znaniecki's analytic induction as six steps:

1. A phenomenon is defined in a tentative manner.
2. A hypothesis is developed about it.
3. A single instance is considered to determine if the hypothesis is confirmed.
4. If the hypothesis fails to be confirmed, either the phenomenon is redefined or the hypothesis is revised to include the instance examined.
5. Additional cases are examined and, if the new hypothesis is repeatedly confirmed, some degree of certainty about the hypothesis results.
6. Each negative case requires that the hypothesis be reformulated until there are no exceptions.

(Cressey cited in Ratcliff, 2001, p. 1)

Analytic induction, however, contrasts to the now more widely used and invoked grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in several ways. Analytic induction tests as well as generates theory and all data available must be used to test hypotheses (Ratcliff, 2000, p. 2). Additionally, 'in interpretive (hermeneutic) research, unlike in grounded theory, the goal is to discover meaning and to achieve understanding' (Benner, 1994, p. 10). Inductive data analysis, as an alternative to grounded theory's 'constant comparison method' (Thomas in White et al., 1998, p. 1) 'is typically qualitative; it makes use of comparisons (typically of cases); it often makes use of techniques which share some affinity with phenomenology and hermeneutics' (Chalip in White et al., 1998, p. 3). By using analytic induction within a phenomenological or hermeneutic approach, a philosophical statement is made about the underpinnings of the analysis (White in White et al., 1998, p. 5).

The concept of this analytic process is not an easy one to envisage. It can be explained as similar to 'brain-storming' techniques. The principles of brainstorming embrace the ideas that all suggestions are considered valuable and that no idea or thought is negated or not included for possible hypothesis testing at a later stage. It is a process of freeing up participants from censoring their thoughts (and each others) and reaching deeper levels of creative reflection and participation in a group process. By eliminating negativity, brainstorming encourages full member participation and contribution to the process.

By concentrating on analytic induction as a process of hypothesis raising and testing in a group setting, a clear cut agenda is set for the reflective team meetings. It is based in the process of revealing data piece by piece with no ancillary information available and then hypothesising on projected future possibilities and/or developments. The principle of this analytic tool is based upon that of 'abduction,' developed by Charles Sanders Peirce. It involves 'generating hypotheses contained in a given unit of empirical data, progressing to hypotheses as to further developments and then testing these with the empirical outcome' (Chamberlayne & King, 1996, p. 213).

Although this narrative approach to evidence review using analytical induction in a reflective team setting is yet to be tested, it is put forth now as one way forward in considerations of systematically reviewing qualitative studies. By returning to the theoretical foundations of both narrative and analytic induction, a case is made for further explorations of systematic review of qualitative work within a framework that is sympathetic to qualitative work itself. Efforts such as these will return reviews of qualitative efforts to a reliance upon the diversity and creativity that has emerged from the development and expansion of qualitative methods over the past decade or so.

### **Relational Qualities to look for in Reviewing Qualitative Research**

Signposts for reviewing research in a qualitative, narrative way:

- **Dialogical**—in what way is dialogue produced: between the researched and the researcher, the researcher and the reader, and the public at large?

‘A performance, such as an interview, is a bounded, theatrical social act, a dialogical production’ (Denzin, 2001, p. 44).

When I finish reading a particular paper, do I feel that the author has just had a conversation with me personally? Have I been drawn in, enticed, has my world been included?

- **Experiential**—how does it evoke a sense of the shared habitus?

‘Habitus—our second nature, the mass of conventions, beliefs and attitudes which each member of a society shares with every other member’ (Scheff, 1997, p. 219).

For example, we all share certain life events in common, no matter what the culture to which we pay allegiance: birth, death, love, hate, hunger, war, poverty, joy and so forth.

- **Reflective**—in what way is the researcher transparent?

‘No longer does the writer-as-interviewer hide behind the question—answer format, the apparatuses of the interview machine’ (Denzin, 2001, p. 30).

Do we know something about the person who is talking to us and is this why we respond/do not respond to what we are reading? Has this been the case with the participants in the study? Is there a direct line of communication from the study participant to the reader, thus keeping the writer transparent?

- **Narrative**—how is it a good story? In what way does it take the form of a familiar plot?

In the best narrative work, descriptive/interpretative analysis is a story about stories. When it veers from this basic concept, it goes off course.

When I, as a narrative researcher, look for stories to tell there is another overarching story to tell in how I came to be in this particular landscape in the first place. What is it about me and my peculiar interface with society, policy, trends and conventions that led me on the particular path I take? If I disclose this half of the circle then the second half makes sense. It is within the fullness of this circle that the hermeneutic process becomes complete. Only when I can find myself in an 'other' can I begin to understand what is unique and individual about an 'other' and ultimately what is distinctive about myself.' (Jones, 2000, p. 2)

### Conclusions

The paper puts forth the argument that the systematic review of qualitative research is best served by reliance upon qualitative methods themselves. Although perhaps misunderstood in more quantitative camps, the narrative review of literature and narrative as a concept and method in itself are natural allies in doing qualitative research. Rather than dismiss the narrative review, a case is made for strengthening it, both by using recent developments in qualitative systematic review and developing a consensus-building tool by using reflective teams to interpret qualitative studies through a system of narrative review.

The essence of qualitative work is described, including its natural concerns with issues such as meaning, truth, purpose and the significance of things. The poignancy and natural ability for issues of ethnicity and diversity to be investigated through a qualitative approach is elaborated. Its inclusionary nature (akin to Participatory Action Research) and ability to give service-users a voice, both through the research process itself and in reports and documents, is reported. The storied nature of health and health information is noted. A case is made for the polyvocal nature of qualitative research and its dialogical, performative qualities. Recent developments in systematic review are discussed, including the Delphi and Signal and Noise techniques. A case is made for the inclusion of grey literature in the review process and its importance as sources of the views of the disadvantaged and disenfranchised. Scoping studies are observed as particularly valuable in reaching consensus and involving service-users and/or their representatives. The earlier development of meta-ethnography as a systematic review process is explained. Recent developments building upon meta-ethnography, including work at the EPPI Centre at the University of London and the work of Campbell, Britten and others, are noted.

A method is proposed that builds on these methodological developments in systematic review by adopting a narrative inductive method to order the landscape of qualitative research reviews, using reflective teams to analyse and interpret aggregate data. Narrative is argued as a particular knowledge-generating method, particularly useful to the interpretation of language-based research. The reflective nature of the hermeneutical is proposed as providing keys to concepts of validity and grounding the method philosophically.

Analytic induction is explained as the predecessor and bedrock of the now more frequently invoked grounded theory. Its history, based in the analysis of human documents, is noted. Inductive reasoning is clarified and the utility of reflective teams as a natural expression of the method is described. Finally, relational qualities that distinguish qualitative research from more quantitative investigation are delineated.



A list of starting points for reflecting on qualitative studies and their usefulness is offered.

The proposed method builds upon developments in systematic review of qualitative documents which are inclusionary and bring service-users and their representatives into the mainstream of the health and social care research agenda. By the use of inductive analysis in reflective team settings to analyse qualitative research healthcare studies, a polyvocal approach to systematic review comes full circle.

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