

# Publishing 'Q'ualitative Research: Some considerations

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# Peer Review

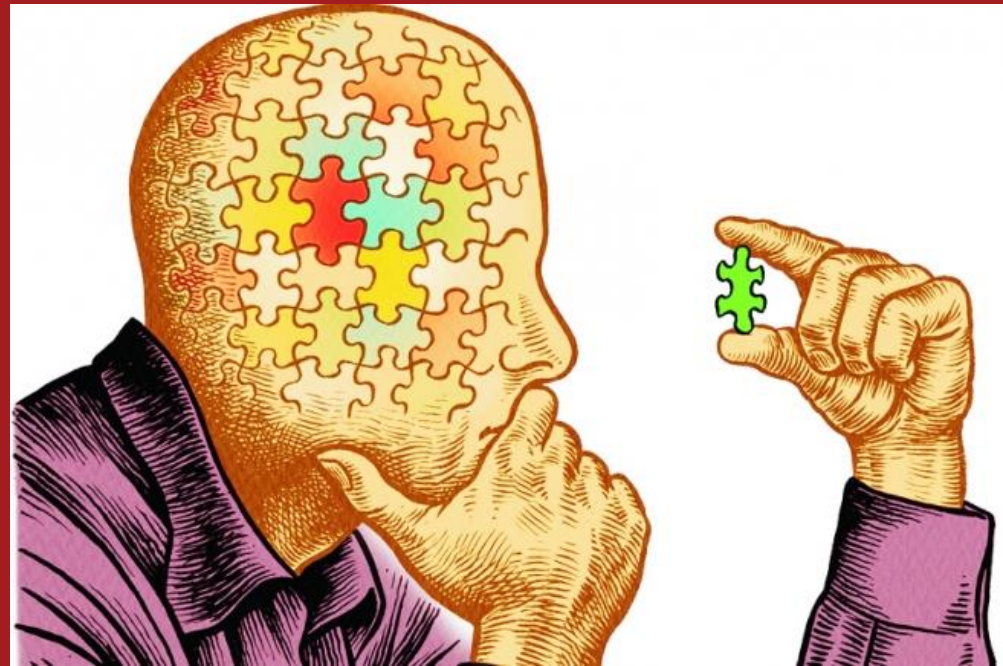
- Anyone been there?
  - (which side of the fence did you sit on?)
- Choose Journal (check scope & aims)
  - E.g. QRSEH and SES = 8x8 per year
- Submit article
  - Different requirements: Usually anonymised paper & other bits
- Reviewed for suitability by editor....
- Editor sends anonymous paper to (usually) 2 reviewers – experts
  - Give feedback and a verdict (usually Accept, Minor, Major revisions and reject)
- Chance to Revise & Resubmit, or not.
- Same again...resulting in acceptance, copy editing/proofing, e-pub and final publication.



## Let's all think like reviewers: Some questions a reviewer will almost certainly ask

1. (Pre-Methods) What 'tradition' does this research fit within? (*however loosely*)
2. What (***exactly***) did the authors do?
  - a) (Is the study ethical?)
  - b) (How did theory influence/shape data analysis & reporting?)
  - c) (What does the study 'look' like? Can I visualise it?)
  - d) (Does this study have theoretical/philosophical/methodological coherence?)
3. How did the researchers deal with their perspectivity? Were they reflexive (*according to point 1*)?
4. How did the researchers decide which data to present? (*judging quality*)

# 1. What 'tradition' does this research fit within?



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List some 'traditions' in qualitative research...

What qualifies as a 'tradition' (what criteria did you consider)?

# 'Traditions' *(according to some 'big methods cheeses')*.

<b>Bradbury_Jones et al (2017): The state of qualitative research in health and social science literature...</b>	<b>Creswell (2013)</b>	<b>Thing &amp; Ottesen (2015)</b>  <b>Mixture of methods &amp; traditions</b>	<b>Smith and Sparkes (2016)</b>	<b>Bryman (2004), Silverman (2017), Braun &amp; Clarke (2013)</b>
Phenomenology	Phenomenology	Phenomenology	Phenomenology	Traditions absent – more generic discussion of philosophy, study design etc.
Narrative	Narratives	Narratives	Narrative Inquiry	
Grounded Theory	Grounded Theory	Hermeneutics	Grounded Theory	
Ethnography	Ethnography	Discourse Analysis	Ethnography	
Case Study	Case Study	Evaluation	Case Studies	
Generic Qualitative		Action Research	Feminisms	
		(and methods, e.g. interviews, group interviews)	Participatory action research	

# 1. What 'tradition' does this research fit within?

- Before I get to the methods section, I would expect to know...
  - Which sub-discipline is this research broadly aligned to?
  - Which corpus of literature does this study 'fit' within?
- Which theory is selected, why, and how is theory *used*?
- As many social science communities have come together via 'Qualitative Research' etc, differences in how theory is defined are clear.
  - E.g. 'Names' versus 'Themes'
  - Baconian, Popperian, Kuhnian logic
- Confusion (or conflation) of theory and methodology?
  - Some Theories are traditions (e.g. Phenomenology)
  - Not all 'Traditions' have a theory (e.g. Case Studies)



Be clear on what theory is in your study: And how it influenced everything else!

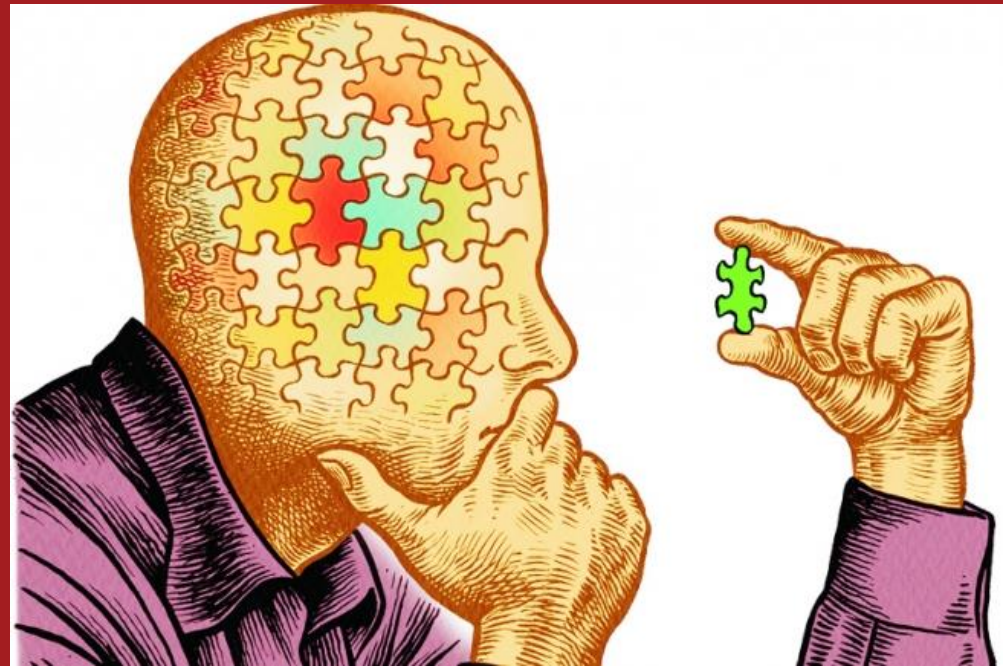




# Reviewer Alarm Bells...Traditions

- Author has not 'situated' the study (or 'framed' it appropriately)
  - Read around!
  - Implies a divergence of original aims and results (*may not be fair...but I'm still thinking it!*)
- Unclear or improper alignment to a tradition/school of thought/literature
  - '*This study is phenomenological because it looked at embodied experiences. We therefore used IPA*'
  - (*But no reference to theorists like Husserl/Merleau-Ponty, no reference to phenomenological processes like bracketing, etc*)
- Random (or ad hoc) selection of theories applied post-hoc to analyse specific bits of data in an off-the-shelf manner
- Philosophical assumptions implicit in an adopted tradition are not followed or are incoherent
  - (*more on this shortly*)

## 2. What (*exactly*) did they do?



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For you, what would a good description of a Qualitative study include?

Another list...



# What (*exactly*) did they do?

- What is the study design (methodology)? Is it robust & rigorous?
  - Did the researchers
    - a) 'Cut' the methods to suit the aim/problem **or**
    - b) 'Cut' their aim/problem to suit their methods?
- How does the aim and the data produced 'fit' with the tradition into which the study is situated?
- Does the study possess ontological, epistemological, theoretical and methodological coherence?



## Simply... (Gibson 2016)

- **Ontology**: The nature of reality
- **Epistemology**: To what extent can we know reality
- **Methodology**: Which most valuable ways knowledge of that reality can be gained
- **Methods**: Research 'tools' (not *necessarily* paradigm-specific)
  
- Many theories have implicit (or even explicit) assumptions related to Ontology & Epistemology. Some even have assumptions related to methodology & method.
  - A choice that isn't a choice?

# Qualitative Myths & Mistakes (See Smith & McGannon 2017, Gibson 2016)

- Common tendency to connect
  - Epist. **Constructionism** with
  - Ontological **Realism** (e.g. member checking, inter-rater reliability, judgement criteria).
  - They are not compatible!
- **Not** saying there is no 'reality' (**not** rejecting the existence of a physical and social world outside a person);
  - Just difficult to assert that we are making contact this reality is knowable independently to our own consciousness. We are subjects.
  - Realities are therefore multiple, changing and mind-dependent for many Qualitative researchers.

# What (*exactly*) did they do?

- Do Methods & Procedures relate directly to the study aim (and methodology)?
  - Inclusion criteria & participant characteristics
  - Procedure (incl. time)
  - Data management and analysis
  - Ethics
- 'Trendyness,' or doing something 'new' for the sake of it *versus* getting the job done; Why were **those** methods selected?
- MMR versus MMMR (e.g. triangulation or crystallization?)
- Language! Clarity is King (or Queen!)





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[the meaning of rigour] may include, but is not limited to, the intellectual precision, robustness, appropriateness, sufficiency and cohesiveness of concepts, methodologies, epistemology, ontology and methods deployed in the research process and output

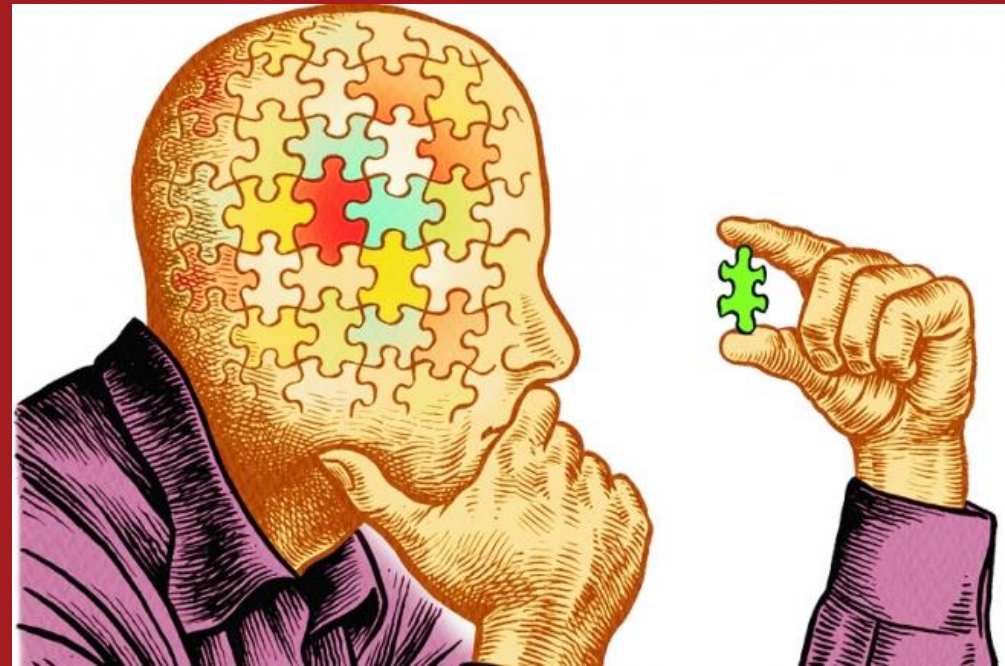
Smith & McGannon 2017: 3

# Reviewer Alarm bells: What *(exactly)* did they do?



- There is no mention of the basics (*you'd be surprised*)
- It is difficult to see a clear link the selected methods to the stated aim
- Give me references folks (preferably not to Undergrad Pensums)
- I have to figure 'it' out
  - I cannot picture or recreate what this study 'looks like' (*and why should I have to, anyway?*)
  - Remember, articles are negotiated, sanitised versions of a study, presented in a 'linear' fashion
  - Balance of clarity versus 'what really happened'

# 3. How did the researchers 'deal' with perspectivity?

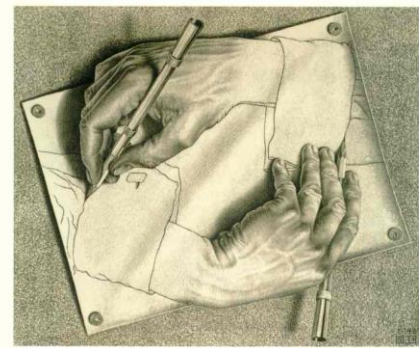


## 4. Being reflexive

- Why do you do, what you do?
  - Why do you do research?
  - For whom do you do 'it'?
- In your last study (or future study), what is your *relative* position to your participants?
  - How might they 'see' you?
- And how do we manage this perspective in your research?  
*(do we need to?)*



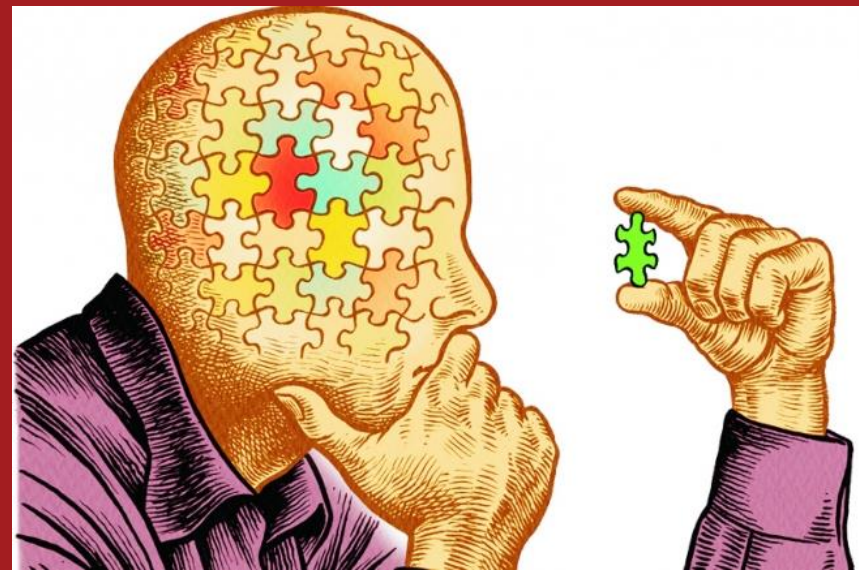
## 4. How did the researchers 'deal' with their perspectivity?



- Conducting any research requires reflection on the researcher's own standpoint (whether explicit or not)
- Many 'traditions' have a manner with which to 'manage' this process
- Requires relation to the structural, political and cultural environments of researcher, the participants, the nature of the study, research process and results (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli 2012: 560, Buscatto 2016)
  - What are the researcher's experiences, values and biases (*and so what*)?
  - What is the researcher's position in relation to the field of research (*and so what*)?
- Also reflection on power relations, shifting the gaze internally also: A 'reflexive shift' (Blodgett et al 2015)
  - Avoiding foundationalism (Smith & McGannon 2017)

# 4. How did the researchers assess the 'quality' of the data presented?

Why *that* data?





x 10



x 1

# Judging 'Quality'



- Judgement should be based upon your theoretical & philosophical position (*coherence again*).
- E.g. Tracy's (2010) 'Universal Criteria' ('Criteriologist'),
  - Worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics and meaningful coherence.
  - ***Cannot*** pick and choose – apply 1, must apply all. And apparently they ***are*** **'universal.'**
- E.g. Sparkes and Smith (2009) ('Relativist')
  - Judgement criteria is socially constructed (Smith & McGannon 2017: 14)
  - Criteria 'closes the system' of what is 'good;' but Tracy did not create the list (synthesized from others)
  - Opens up the possibility of **adapting judgement criteria** to the research context, participants etc.
  - E.g. New topics/questions, Obsolete/irrelevant topics, Agenda, Credibility, Sincerity, 'Transformation', Emotions



# Reviewer Alarm Bells: Quality



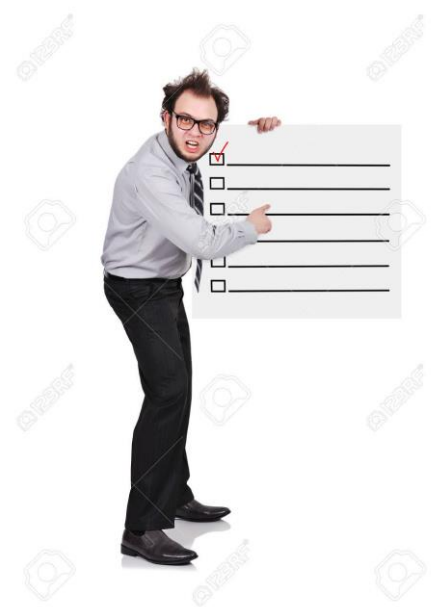
- (In '*Q*'ualitative research) Using measures of validity and reliability in a manner more commensurate with the natural sciences E.g. 'Reliability checking' and inter-rater reliability
- Talking about 'representativeness' and other markers of ***experimental*** (*post-positivist*) fidelity etc
- Talking about subjectivity, interpretation or 'bias' as a negative thing, or 'noise' that must be 'controlled'
  - Check philosophy – it could be ok. But probably isn't.

# Summary

- Thinking like a reviewer, would seem to imply we are seeking to see...
- A Clear **Aim** that leads to....
- **Justifiable**, clear **choices** (e.g. reflexive processes, judging quality, target group) which enables us to see...
- Clarity in '**what we did**' which is informed by...
- Clear use of **theory**, which is matched by...
- **Coherence** between Philosophy, Methodology and Outcomes, which produces...
- A **rigorous**, Qualitative study!
  - *(that is clear)*



# Having said all that...



- Beware the checklist!
- Journals (and editors, and reviewers) differ in their expectations
  - E.g. Tables of participant data, or not?
- Check previous papers from your target journal carefully, see what they have included and excluded.
  - How open to new ideas (or just Qualitative research in general) are they?
  - E.g. #BMJNoQual, the RCT 'Fetish'

## Some references

- Evans, A. B., Nistrup, A., Henderson, H., Allen-Collinson, J. and Siriwardena, N. A. (2018). *Reflexivity in qualitative research: Two figurational studies*. Sage Online Qualitative Case Studies (in press). Sage Publications, Incorporated, 2018 (on request).
- Smith, B and Sparkes, A.S. (2017): Routledge handbook of qualitative research in Sport & Exercise.' London, Routledge.
  - E.g. see chapters by Gibson, Cassidy and on 'Traditions'
- Sparkes, A. C. and B. Smith (2009). "Judging the quality of qualitative inquiry: Criteriology and relativism in action." Psychology of Sport and Exercise **10**(5): 491-497.
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- Tracy, S. J. (2010). "Qualitative quality: Eight "big-tent" criteria for excellent qualitative research." Qualitative inquiry **16**(10): 837-851.



Thank You!  
Any questions?

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