"Too ambitious": What happens when funders misunderstand the strengths of qualitative research design

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Abstract

Differences in what makes for a good quantitative or qualitative research design often lead funders to misinformed evaluations of the strengths of exemplary qualitative research. Based on the author's experience with numerous national funders in Canada and overseas, problems getting qualitative research funded is discussed. Specifically, sampling issues will be looked at along a continuum, comparing monocular, homogenous sampling of marginalized voices more in keeping with positivist research principles familiar to funders to the polyocular heterogenous innovation popular with qualitative researchers who seek multiple voices across multiple contexts. Successfully funded studies will be discussed as examples of how to convince funders to evaluate qualitative research on its own merits, as well as a number of unsuccessful grant applications that were evaluated with criteria that seemed paradigmatically incongruent with qualitative designs. Four strategies my colleagues and I have used will be highlighted. These strategies I call: *dressing up; sleeping with the elephant; search but never find;* and *table*

scraps. The advantages specific to qualitative designs and sampling will be detailed in order to propose a template for funders to evaluate the merits of qualitative design.

Key words: Funding, research criteria, review process, mixed methods

A large and experienced team of co-investigators and I recently submitted an application for funding to the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), Canada's foremost health research body. That proposal outlined research intended to examine differences in how resilient and non-resilient youth "negotiate" for health resources (e.g. secure attachments to caregivers, a sense of belonging to their community, personal control, adequate housing and educational opportunities) with their families, communities and service delivery systems that provide them support, treatment and care. Our intention was to look at four service delivery systems that most influence access to social and psychological determinants of children's well-being (Child Welfare, Mental Health, Corrections and Education) in three settings (one urban, one rural, and one northern Inuit community). We made the case strongly that to date very little study has been done on resilience that looks at the systems of care mandated to service at-risk children, nor how children and families manoeuver between systems to secure resources. The methods we choose combined culturally anchored qualitative approaches and an innovative Child and Youth Resilience Measure, a quantitative tool developed through a global culturally grounded collaboration.

There was no doubt the anonymous reviewers found the project "important" "innovative" and applauded its cultural sensitivity. But our intention to include 4 mandated services and 1 community service provider in each of the 3 settings, gathering data from case file reviews and interviews with both youth and families, introduced a degree of complexity that raised concerns for the reviewers. Not so our 15 community partners who in letters to CIHR embraced the research and made assurances it was achievable and welcomed by the communities involved. Of course, such a complex design would mean small sample sizes as is often the case in exploratory work. For the quantitative aspects of the study, we would gather

data on between 30 and 60 youth at each of the 15 sites. For the qualitative part of the study we intended to select 2 boys and 2 girls from each agency in three settings, providing 60 detailed case studies with data from multiple sources and multiple informants. While as a team, my colleagues and I were open to criticism, it was disheartening to read one reviewer's comment that: "this is a large and complex study design that is very ambitious and *perhaps too ambitious*". That comment, like others, hit a nerve.

This paper is a response to reviewers who privilege the exigencies of quantitative methods over the value and reasoning behind qualitative research, whether that research is part of a mixed methods design or not. Clearly, in the above case, the reviewers did not consider the strengths of the qualitative design, but only the weaknesses of the study from the perspective of quantitative methods. I will use this and other examples to examine differences in the criteria for good quantitative and qualitative research and how confusion (and ignorance) of the criteria for judging qualitative work often leads funders to misinformed evaluations of the strengths of exemplary qualitative research. I will base my discussion on my experience with numerous national funders in Canada and elsewhere, and the problems my colleagues and I have encountered getting qualitative research funded, as well as our successes.

Specifically, four strategies my colleagues and I have used to deal with this problem will be discussed along with four successfully funded research projects. These four strategies I playfully call: *dressing up; sleeping with the elephant; search but never find;* and *table scraps*. I will also discuss some unsuccessful grant applications that were evaluated with criteria that seemed paradigmatically incongruent with qualitative designs. Finally, I will make the argument that just as quantitative research would have a difficult time "measuring up" to the criteria for good research set by qualitative researchers, funders must take more responsibility to evaluate qualitative designs by appropriate criteria. It is not my goal, however, to identify a set of criteria specifically. That is a larger project already well underway (see Creswell, 1998; Seale, 1999; Smith & Deemer, 2003; Ungar, 2001). My intent here is more modest: how to cope in a world that privileges one kind of knowledge generation over another?

Rigour by Design

Arguably, if we are insisting that qualitative research be judged on its own merits, then it would be fortuitous to provide reviewers with the criteria to make such judgements. If only it were so simple! In the race for conceptual finitude, the empiricists won because the naturalists never appeared to be very keen to participate in the first place.

Those who have been willing to participate include most notably Lincoln and Guba (1985) whose earliest attempt to create a coherent understanding of rigour in qualitative studies proposed four criteria for what they termed "trustworthiness". Trustworthiness was meant to roughly parallel the standards of internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity so quintessential to quantitative research. Rigour in qualitative studies would seek instead credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Credibility (the parallel to internal validity), for example, could be addressed through prolonged engagement with the data, a search for exceptional cases and self-reflection by researchers on their subjectivity. Transferability (external validity) is addressed through "thick description" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and contextualization of the data but leaves the onus on consumers of the research to decide if findings from one study fit with the context of another. Dependability (reliability) is assured through inquiry audits, which assess the fit between the process of inquiry and the issues and questions under study through third party review such as focus groups. Finally, confirmability (objectivity) can be assured through an external audit of the data analysis and thematic constructions by researchers outside the study who can comment on the theory generated and the process of its generation. A few years later, Guba and Lincoln (1989) introduced a fifth criteria, authenticity. Authenticity refers to the ability of the researcher to meet the standard of fairness. Researchers are expected to have adequately represented (better yet, *re-*presented) the views of participants in the research. Specifically, authenticity addresses four questions:

1) Have multiple data sources and theoretical schemes been used to demonstrate

congruence of the findings (Triangulation of the data)?

2) Have the researcher and the participants in the study challenged predetermined biases and negotiated new meanings about the experiences of those whose lives were examined (Construct validity)?

3) Does what was discovered make sense to the various stakeholders? Does it reflect their world views (Face validity)?

4) Will the findings point to future action and lead to changes in the material presented in the program (Catalytic validity)? (see Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lather, 1991)

Combined, these approaches ensure rigor as the result of the hermeneutic process of the research itself. Qualitative researchers assert that when participants are engaged fully in both the generation of their data and its interpretation, the resulting constructions of reality are more reflective of the participant's experiences (Rodwell, 1998).

If these criteria were used to evaluate *all* social science research, one would wonder whether much of it would be found wanting. The problematizing of quantitative research is still peripheral to academic discourse, especially among funders. There has been little success thus far understanding the research process as primarily a political one, something much easier to do when bound by the criteria for qualitative research detailed above. Does research, for example, represent marginalized voices or does the research lend support to oppressive institutions and their practices? Clinical research with children diagnosed with ADHD, depression or eating disorders has shown that when co-research is undertaken, the accounts by individuals of their "illness" seldom concurs with professional claims about their condition, motives or paths to wellness (Law, 1997; Madigan & Law, 1998; Nylund & Ceske, 1997). The problem of research being naively apolitical, and therefore largely unevaluated for its trustworthiness or authenticity, becomes even more acute when we look at rigour from the perspective of colonized peoples where western models of research are experienced as particularly oppressive. In her discussion of research with indigenous people's world wide, Smith (1999) argues for a new research agenda situated within the politics of decolonization. Research should be

focused strategically on the goal of self-determination of indigenous peoples. Self-determination in a research agenda becomes something more than a political goal. It becomes a goal of social justice which is expressed through and across a wide range of psychological, social, cultural and economic terrains. It necessarily involves the processes of transformation, of decolonization, of healing and of mobilization as peoples. The processes, approaches and methodologies–while dynamic and open to different influences and possibilities–are critical elements of a strategic research agenda. (pp. 115-116)

Criteria Confusion

There are great challenges ensuring that funders judge qualitative research, and more preferably, all research, by such benchmarks of a politicized accountability. The first of these is that different qualitative research traditions hold to different standards of quality. As Seale (1999) explains "In qualitative research the project of criteriology experiences particular contradictions because of the difficulty in regulating and constraining an endeavour whose guiding philosophy often stresses creativity, exploration, conceptual flexibility and a freedom of spirit" (p.43). If we look across traditions, we see that standards are expressed through practices, but that these practices depend on the tradition under which the qualitative research falls. Therefore, the argument goes, we cannot have any overarching set of standards so pedestrian as those of our quantitative colleagues.

This argument may be theoretically sound, but practically threatens to leave qualitative research sitting silently in the corner and penniless. I am more inclined to argue, as others have, that there are common elements of good design that qualitative researchers have tended to hold to. However, our funders have not been as cognizant as us of these criteria nor have their reviewers demonstrated sufficient competence to judge the merits of qualitative research. Creswell (1998) argues, for example, that there are eight common procedures for verification of

qualitative studies: prolonged engagement and persistent observation; triangulation; peer review or debriefing; modifying hypotheses based on negative case analysis; clarifying researcher bias; member checks to solicit informants' views of the findings; rich, thick description to inform transferability by the consumer of the research; and external audits to assess accuracy. Cresswell insists that at least two of these procedures are necessary for any study to argue its findings are well verified.

As if this first challenge doesn't present enough of a problem providing grant reviewers with criteria that fits the qualitative research paradigm, qualitative researchers have by their nature been resistant to reifying standards that are nothing more than social constructions. The second challenge then, is to find a balance between epistemological constructivism and ontological realism. Smith and Deemer (2003) explain this tension as one in which quasi-foundationalists will insist there is a world out there that exists beyond interpretation (realism) but that our relationship with that world is interpreted and constructed. The nonfoundationalist, they say, prefer to avoid such a compromised position. Instead, they embrace relativism. They see research criteria as a question of ethics and judgement rather than epistemology and procedure. Simply put, "Criteria should not be though of in abstraction, but as a list of features that we think, or more or less agree at any given time and place, characterize good versus bad inquiry. This is a list that can be challenged, added to, subtracted from, modified, and so on, as it is applied in actual practice–in actual application to actual inquiries" (p.454). Surely this is enough to drive any empiricist from the room. "Not only can't you as qualitative researchers agree on a list of criteria good enough for all studies," they will say, "now you are telling us that the list is not even going to stand the test of time!"

There is no simple answer to this problem. We have simply to accept that in the end all criteria must be relative, a reflection of our propensity as humans to make judgements about our world. We must accept an uneasy truce, the illusion of certainty. How can it be otherwise? A plurality of perspectives make it clear there can be no non-contextualized understanding of what makes for good research. At some point, we are forced to admit we live by consensus as to

what is right and wrong at this point in time. Otherwise, as Smith and Deemer (2003) explain, we run the risk that our work becomes so "fragmented that lines of connection have been lost and the social amelioration possibilities of our work have been rendered moot" (p.454).

If we are to advance, then I find reassurance that I can assert, at least for the moment, a set of judgements about what I want funders to consider as criteria by which to judge me. Funders have to make judgements, irrespective of whether my colleagues and I provide them with criteria or not. Somebody is going to privilege one set of procedures over another. Preferable, I say, that we participate as a group of researchers in influencing that scientific discourse. Thus, while in an ironic turn of events, Lincoln (2002) may be ready to assert "we may be moving beyond criteriology and the search for uniform criteria" (p.341), ours may be a premature conversion given the lack of understanding among our funders as to what the heck we, as qualitative researchers, were doing in the first place.

Questions of agreement and relativism imply, of course, that we as qualitative researchers have something good to offer. To my mind, the third challenge to ensuring qualitative research is judged by appropriate standards is the threat that poor quality, depoliticized examples of qualitative research pose to the field. Anyone who has attended an academic conference knows how unsettling it is when ill-conceived qualitative research is presented. I always feel slightly dirty afterwards, as if somehow I have been found guilty by association.

The individuals involved should not be blamed entirely. Typically, poorly designed small studies are not funded except as student projects. There is little accountability and we are happy to overlook the problems. In my experience, though, larger studies that fail to impress me methodologically have usually snuck by reviewers because they may look like a good study to those more familiar with quantitative criteria. Sadly, an absence of awareness among funders of what makes for good qualitative research has in many instances been likely to produce poor quality research. Take for example a recent paper by Moffat and Legault (2004) that detailed responses by a sample of 647 9-21 year-olds living "in care". The large n should be a hint as to

why this one slipped through. All the youth were interviewed with a structured questionnaire regarding the positive life events that had occurred for them. All were referred to the study by their social workers meaning all were likely youth the social workers wanted interviewed as examples of children living successfully in care. Of the 1530 items named as positive life events, it seems remarkably odd that no respondents mentioned even one episode of doing drugs, drinking, sexual activity or vandalism as a recent event in their lives that they experienced as enjoyable. Youth told the researchers instead about visits with their natural parents, the games they played, even "improvement in hygiene skills". A study such as this with the express purpose to document children's own perspectives of the events in their lives was simply poorly designed with little awareness shown to issues of authenticity and trustworthiness. Data collection occurred in most cases with the child's social worker present and as part of an annual review of the child's progress, meaning there were dynamics of power that were not acknowledged by the researchers. Such methodologically weak examples of qualitative research threaten to undermine the potential of its more rigorous applications.

Getting Funding through the Strategic use of Qualitative Methods

Far from cynical, I am optimistic that good qualitative research in the social sciences can be, and is being, funded. However, in the absence of our funders' familiarity with criteria for judging qualitative research, a number of different strategies seem to be preferred by my colleagues and I as ways to speak across the paradigmatic divide of empirically oriented reviewers and qualitatively inclined researchers.

Strategy One: Dressing up

One way to ensure credibility with funders is to *dress up* a qualitative study to make it look quantitative. The Hidden Hurt project did exactly this. A unique opportunity arose when the Canadian Red Cross RespectED Program staff observed that a significant number of

anonymous evaluation forms completed by violence prevention program participants between the ages of 13 and 19 contained unsolicited disclosures of abuse. Funding was secured from the Solicitor General of Canada under a community research program to look at these anonymous disclosures. A national sample of 2244 evaluation forms (1621 forms containing disclosures of abuse and a comparison group of 623 forms) from two RespectED programs delivered between 2000 and 2003 were collected and analysed using grounded theory methods (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and NVivo software (Qualitative Solutions and Research, 1999). The voluntary, anonymous disclosures of abuse on these forms recounted incidents of abuse towards the participants or someone known to them.

The study used only qualitative techniques and descriptive statistics (counts of number of girls and boys, ages, etc.). In order to contextualize the data and engage youth and program facilitators in a dialogical process to understand the findings as they emerged, a national sample of 27 focus groups were conducted, including coast to coast meetings with groups of youth who had participated in the programs. It is worth noting, however, that during the initial funding application, it was the content analysis of a large national sample that caught the funder's attention. Contextualizing activities, which proved to be as insightful to the project, were supported but were seen as supplemental to the real work being done, that being analysis of a large n data base. This strategy was intentional, even though it was the contextualizing activities that made the study's theory generation far more trustworthy and authentic. Indeed, such activities typically improve greatly the findings from both aspects of a mixed design. Monocular, homogenous sampling of marginalized voices more in keeping with positivist research principles and familiar to funders are slowly being replaced by a push for polyocular heterogenous innovation in sampling more in keeping with the preferences of qualitative researchers who seek multiple voices across multiple contexts. While we wait for this trend to continue, dressing up a proposal by sampling little bits of qualitative data from a large n sample is one way to have research successfully funded.

Strategy Two: Sleeping with the elephant

The second useful strategy to make qualitative research more fundable is to acknowledge that funders would prefer to support quantitative research. Strategically, it is easier to get funded when we climb in bed with the elephant, creating mixed method designs that leave all parties satisfied. The challenge in mixed method designs is to reach a *detente* between researchers from different paradigms. Qualitative and quantitative methods must be well integrated, though often it seems that the qualitative researcher must accept being less visible in the mix.

As an example of how this can work successfully, colleagues of mine from around the world and I launched the International Resilience Project (IRP), a multi-year research study funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada to develop a better, more culturally sensitive understanding of how youth effectively cope with adversity across global contexts. More specifically, the IRP aims to address two frequently noted shortcomings in studies of resilience, namely, the arbitrariness in the selection of outcome variables and the challenge of accounting for the social and cultural context in which resilience occurs. To address these issues, a diverse team from fourteen communities on five continents has been working with high-risk youth facing war, violence, cultural disintegration, structural inequalities and mental health challenges to examine individual, interpersonal, family, community and cultural factors associated with resilience. The project includes youth and elders in communities as diverse as Halifax, Winnipeg (urban aboriginal and non-aboriginal sites), Northern Canada, Palestine, Israel, Colombia, Gambia, Tanzania, South Africa, Russia, Hong Kong, India and Florida. The project includes three intersecting goals: 1) to articulate a cross-cultural perspective on health through a culturally-anchored research design; 2) to examine emic vs. etic perspectives in studies of resilience; and 3) to seek convergence between research paradigms through inclusion of both qualitative and quantitative methods. While there is abundant quantitative work on resilience (Kirby & Fraser, 1997; Luthar, 2003), less well known are the

qualitative studies by Schofield (2001), Hauser (1999), Graham (2001), Felsman (1989), de Antoni and Koller (2000), Klevens & Roca (1999), Todis, Bullis, Waintrup, Schultz, and D'Ambrosio (2001), Rak (2002), Apfel and Simon (2000) and Ungar (2004). Notably, qualitative work has focused much more on North American aboriginal cultures, Israeli and Palestinian children, Brazilian and Colombian street youth, and other marginalized youth in a number of international settings. These studies have demonstrated that individuals, families, and communities create for themselves highly specific understandings of their health and the risks they face based on their race, ethnicity, class, gender, ability, sexual orientation, age, geography and health status. However, as we explained to funders, these studies have lacked generalizability, and therefore infrequently inform quantitative studies. Our goal was to bridge the gap.

The IRP has managed to develop and pilot a new resilience measure that is integrated with a process of research heavily reliant on contextualizing activities that include qualitative methods in the design. The project also included an entirely separate collection of life histories and interview data from at-risk youth in each of th 14 sites. The results have thus far been satisfying to all members of the team, with a number of other research projects having been developed and funded as a consequence of the work done as part of the IRP. Most of these initiatives focus on the quantitative instrument we have developed, but have also shown interest in the qualitative aspects of the design that ensure the instrument is contextualized when used.

Strategy Three: Seek but never find

A third strategy to make qualitative research more fundable is to couch it in the language of an "exploratory study," one step in the development of empirically verifiable truth claims. The qualitative researcher shows a self-deprecating restraint: "I will seek but never find any truth," he or she must assert in order to sound credible. I accept my role (at least appear to be doing so) to set the stage for the 'real' (quantitative) study which has yet to be done but is often promised.

This was the strategy I employed when I conducted over a five-year period funded Doctoral and institutional research with 43 youth facing mental health challenges. The study included a purposeful sample of youth who clinicians judged to be at risk while also showing variability in their capacities to cope with adversity. A number of compromises were made in order to make the research of interest to both funders and institutional gatekeepers who had to be convinced to allow the study to proceed. Parts of the study and data collection were explained as an opportunity to ask youth to evaluate their experience in treatment and care. The study was described as exploratory, and it was anticipated that the findings would inform the development of an instrument to measure resilience among this population. Sampling and other design features proceeded with *a priori* assumptions that, though they undermined the trustworthiness of the findings from a qualitative perspective, met demands for good study design by the funder. For example, initially, in order to make the sampling appear more structured, the youth were classified into four categories based on a two factor understanding of mental illness as distinct from mental health. Within this model, the presence or absence of a mental disorder (like ADHD) was viewed as distinct from measures of a child's well-being (how well the child functions socially, his or her level of self-esteem and other related health indicators) (see Bradburn, 1969; Health and Welfare Canada, 1988; Ungar & Teram, 2001). Crossing the two continua created a four cell matrix into which participants were slotted and matched based on their designation as either resilient or vulnerable. This sampling structure was later challenged by the youth themselves who argued it was at best an arbitrary distinction to classify them in this way. However, from a design perspective, the orderly portrayal of youth into predetermined categories satisfied the need for a coherent sampling procedure, even if the study was to be entirely qualitative. At the time it seemed unduly ambitious to educate funders about "emergent design" and sampling for variability, much less arguing against categorizations that could bias the findings. Data collection and analysis relied on grounded theory methods, which as Gilgun (1999) has noted, present a comfortable bridge between positivist and post-positivist research. Finally, it was emphasized to funders that the theory generated would

inform practice and policy (see Teram, Schachter & Stalker, in press). There was little interest in whether the theory was representative of the voice of participants or the researcher, questions emblematic of good qualitative work.

Procedurally, youth were interviewed twice, once in an office setting, the second time in their homes without a parent present. Case files were also reviewed and families interviewed. Combined this approach gave a thick description of these children's ways of sustaining mental health and its connection to empowerment, work that eventually grew into discussions of resilience and cultural variability in response to chronic and acute stressors. Compromises in design were dealt with later by ensuring reciprocity in the data collection and member checks with participants, procedures that resulted in many of the initial assumptions that underpinned sampling and data collection activities shown to be faulty. As good as the findings were (and publishable), the genesis for the project was as an exploratory study alone. That it grew into much more should attest to the viability of good qualitative research.

Strategy Four: Table scraps

My fourth strategy is to accept that sometimes qualitative research is fundable when ambitions are small and the monetary commitment inconsequential to funders, or simply part of other research agendas. The qualitative researcher is not seeking a piece of the pie, only a share of the table scraps and other leftovers. When small amounts of cash are on the line, it seems the number of qualitative studies increases as a proportion of successful applications. Student projects, projects that seek to elicit from communities themselves first voice accounts of their experiences, funders associated with government departments whose mandate is service, not research, and of course university faculties who can provide internal seed funding, all appear to look more kindly on the small *n* of the qualitative researcher.

In one example, colleagues and I (Ungar, Karabanow & MacDonald, 2002) applied for a seed grant from our faculty in order to pilot our data collection methods and build the linkages necessary for a larger grant application, the application discussed at the beginning of this paper.

It was an easy sell to get the $5,000 we needed to investigate constructions of resilience among 10 high-risk youth who had previous involvement with child welfare (a mandated service) and a program for street youth (a non-mandated community service). We sought to understand from the perspective of youth themselves how they navigate their way toward the health resources they require to sustain well-being? How do interventions by the systems which provide services affect the ability of youth to cope with adverse life circumstances? In answering these broad questions, we came to a better understanding of how youth sustain their well-being through negotiations for health resources.

Youth were identified by formal service providers who fit broad criteria for "doing well", while staff in complementary informal community based services identified more vulnerable youth (those continuing to display behaviours which put them substantially at-risk from truancy, substance abuse, delinquency, self-mutilation, depression, etc.) but who had had involvement with the child welfare office. The choice of sample reflected our assumption that child welfare workers would be hesitant to forward to the researchers names of youth they worked with who had been unsuccessful, but would be more willing to nominate those whom they felt they had influenced positively. An elaborate referral system was used to ensure the anonymity of potential participants and to avoid any perception of coercion. In-depth interviews with the youth and reviews of each youth's departmental file formed the basis for the data collection. One primary caregiver, formal or informal, for each youth was also invited to participate. As a small study, the work produced interesting findings and has been of interest to both the agencies involved and other similar service providers, though the small scale of the research has meant it is treated as nothing more than an "exploratory" study and a "piloting" of methods.

When Good is still not Good Enough

Even using the above four strategies, success is far from guaranteed. When research proposals fail to slot neatly into the expectations of funders, or when funders use the wrong

criteria to judge their worth, the results are predictably unsatisfying. Communities do not get the research they want done, researchers don't get the information they need to advance their fields of practice, and the overall western scientific project hiccups.

A few examples of studies I have submitted for funding that did not get funded can be illustrative of how qualitative research is still viewed by funders. Of course, nothing in this account is meant to say that every project listed here was worthy of funding. Quite the contrary. Some, admittedly, had major flaws and the review process was helpful in identifying their weaknesses. However, seldom were the flaws in the qualitative methods adequately addressed, much less even noted, by reviewers. Instead, reviewers tended almost universally to comment on aspects of the methodologies that were weak by quantitative standards rather than demonstrating competence to critique the studies heuristically based on the methodologies proposed.

If I return again to the example that opens this paper, the reviewers' comments are particularly insightful with regard to the methodological preferences of large national funders. One reviewer, for example, clearly understood the innovative nature of the study and the ambiguity that exists in theories to explain children's migrations between services. However, the generation of detailed, triangulated accounts of client's experiences based on interviews, file reviews, family and caregiver interviews and other aspects of the proposed detailed case studies were still, to the reviewer's mind, insufficient to generate findings regarding "information on children's outcomes." The reviewer writes: "the proposed study does not incorporate measures of child outcomes per se. What is the outcome for this study, then?" Even more telling is the quantitative language embedded in another reviewer's critique of the qualitative methods: "With respect to the qualitative data analysis, the general procedures are clear, *but not the goal.* What types of themes will be examined in the qualitative data and how will those themes inform the research questions." Though detail was provided on the constant comparative method, and the trustworthiness of findings, as well as the way Nvivo software helps to generate themes from the data itself, it was still expected that themes, like variables, would be predetermined.

An equally telling example was a proposed half million dollar study of health perceptions among youth ages 18-24 that was to include a sample of young people coast to coast in Canada. The lead investigator with whom I was collaborating had managed to ensure that a small purposeful sample of youth would be interviewed in each of the country's ten provinces. One reviewer's comment, however, summarized the issues the funder had with the project: "I would be more comfortable supporting this research if it covered less territory but did so in a more encompassing way." Clearly, what the research team had argued was the study's strength, the juxtaposition of multiple constructions of health coast to coast, was viewed as a weakness and the study was not funded.

Another qualitative proposal that was submitted for funding to investigate children's experiences of the mental health system, argued that children's experiences were qualitatively different from accounts made by their caregivers and service providers. This proposal too was not funded by a regional body responsible for health research. They rejected the proposal out of hand, saying "A brief consultation around the research design has raised concerns about the merit of such a study based upon small research numbers, the lack of a comparison group, and the usefulness of the information collected."

Similarly in an application to the National Institute of Mental Health in the United States for a development grant to begin discussion across cultures on what constitutes health outcomes and refine definitions of resilience, reviewers argued that the proposed series of focus groups and meetings lacked "testable hypotheses" and that the proposal itself provided "scant coverage of the various theoretical models of child development," meaning of course, western Eurocentric models. This, despite the fact that the reviewers applauded the "potential to address fundamental questions that span a number of psychological processes". Even more odd, one reviewer questioned the need to talk *across* disciplines and cultures if the goal was to investigate culture specific differences in understandings of resilience. The need to create discursive alliances to oppose a dominant Eurocentric bias, one aspect of supporting an authentic account of people's lived experience, seemed to be completely overlooked as a

strength of the proposal. Another reviewer of the same grant wrote: "Convening a number of investigators from different disciplines and different countries to discuss, debate and agree on the concept of resilience does not seem to be adequate for advancing the state of the science".

Compromise and Solution

I haven't given up trying. In fact, I have found it better to use the four strategies I named above than to challenge the Establishment head on. In this regard, I follow others like Teram (Teram et al., in press) who in order to get the results of a study conducted with sexual abuse survivors regarding their experiences of physiotherapy taken seriously (inform policy and training of physiotherapists), proposed a compromise between conducting Participatory Action Research and a grounded theory investigation. It was felt that the grounded theory approach was more amenable to those who support evidence based practice. It generated substantial theory that could be validated and was not shy about linking that theory to other studies that predated it. The PAR, however, was far more in keeping with the principles of ethical research with abuse survivors. But an exclusive focus on the privileging of disempowered nonprofessional voices would, Teram and his colleagues felt, have marginalized the results of their work, if it had been funded at all.

As long as funders remain biased in their choice of criteria that privileges quantitative research over qualitative approaches, then as a field qualitative researchers are going to have to find creative solutions to compete. Providing funders and their reviewers with a solid set of criteria would help, but would not likely dethrone the empiricists. Arguing for equanimity in the review process, with qualitative reviewers for qualitative methodologies, would be a more reasonable place to begin. Neither solution, however, seems imminent. The four strategies I discussed above are not the final word. Articulating them may imply I have given up when in fact I see these options as simply a weigh station on the road to a more fair evaluation of *all* research. Research, whether primarily qualitative or quantitative, in increasingly being held accountable to those who participate (Smith, 1999). Perhaps it is time to consider whether

quantitative research should be required to measure up to the standards of the best of qualitative designs?

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