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Communicating Qualitative Research: Some Practical Guideposts for Scholars

The purpose of this article is to provide guidance to scholars regarding key aspects of writing qualitative manuscripts. The aim is to offer practical suggestions as opposed to examining epistemological or theoretical issues and debates related to qualitative family research. The authors begin by providing guideposts in writing the major sections of a qualitative article (Introduction, Method, Results, and Discussion). In doing so, they address issues such as composing a literature review, providing sufficient details on the qualitative data analysis, and effectively communicating the contribution of the work. They end by providing some general suggestions for scholars seeking professional development in qualitative research methods and analysis.

In the current article we seek to build on the foundational contributions of other scholars who have provided guidance on how to present and publish qualitative research (e.g., Ambert, Adler, Adler, & Detzner, 1995; Matthews, 2005) as well as the momentum generated by recent articles on the epistemology, conduct, and presentation of qualitative family research (e.g.,

LaRossa, 2012; Zvonkovic, Sharp, & Radina, 2012). Our primary aim is to provide guidance to scholars regarding key aspects of writing qualitative manuscripts. Our goal is not to be overly didactic but rather to provide guideposts that will prove instructive to individuals who wish to publish qualitative work in the *Journal of Marriage and Family (JMF)* as well as other family journals. We recognize that there is an inherent danger in providing guidelines in that such guidelines can be interpreted as rules or as the keys to success. Thus, we underscore that in our effort to help others be successful in publishing their qualitative work, we do not wish to provide a new mandate to be followed or to promise that following these steps will guarantee success. Neither do we wish these suggestions to be seen as though we are offering a step-by-step formula or rubric whereby, if each item is checked off, then the goal has been met. Our aim, then, is to provide practical guideposts—but not to stifle the creative efforts that are the hallmark of outstanding qualitative research. We recognize that adhering to guidelines is in tension with “breaking out of the mold.” Thus, we encourage scholars to hold these guidelines lightly, so as to fully engage the creative possibilities that can come from the qualitative representation of data.

A related aim of this article is to encourage scholars to submit their qualitative research to *JMF* so that there is more high-quality research to review and publish. Throughout the past several decades, scholars have noted that a paucity of qualitative research is published in *JMF* (e.g., Ambert et al., 1995; LaRossa, 2012; LaRossa

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This article was edited by Kevin M. Roy.

Key Words: professional development, qualitative data analysis, qualitative family research, qualitative methods, writing.

& Wolf, 1985; Matthews, 2005) as well as in other family journals (see Humble, 2012). In turn, the lack of qualitative research published in *JMF* was recently the focus of a special issue of *JMF* (see LaRossa, 2012). This special issue, along with a special issue of the *Journal of Family Theory and Review* (see Zvonkovic et al., 2012), were designed to spark new dialogue about the “culture” of qualitative research in family studies and to assess the publication of qualitative family research in recent years. These efforts prompted the formation of a Qualitative Research Commission: a group of scholars whose charge was, in part, to provide guidance for writing, reviewing, and editing qualitative works submitted to *JMF* (see LaRossa, 2012, p. 657). Thus, we hope that this article will contribute to the current interest in and ongoing efforts to stimulate a more vibrant qualitative research culture in *JMF*. Furthermore, we hope that these guideposts will be helpful in aiding qualitative family researchers in publishing in other premier journals (Huy, 2012), as well as aiding primarily quantitative researchers who review qualitative work for *JMF* and other journals.

Toward this end, we next address the major sections of a qualitative research article in *JMF* (Introduction, Method, Results, and Discussion). We end by providing some general suggestions for scholars seeking professional development in qualitative research methods and analysis. Again, the primary goal of this article is to provide practical suggestions as opposed to examining epistemological or theoretical issues and debates related to qualitative research. Given the momentum in the family field for qualitative research, there are many additional resources for such theoretical elaboration and debates (see, e.g., K. R. Allen, 2000; Daly, 2007; Gilgun, 2013; LaRossa, 2005, 2012; Zvonkovic et al., 2012).

INTRODUCTION IN QUALITATIVE ARTICLES

The introductory material of a qualitative article should typically constitute about 20%–25% of the overall document. Thus, in a 35-page article, the Introduction would be approximately 7–9 manuscript pages. (Of note is that our guidelines for page lengths come from our own experience; other authors, such as Matthews, 2005, have provided additional advice.) In general, the Introduction begins with a review of the literature and

ends with a description of the current study foci and goals. Alternatively, authors may prefer to provide a description of the current study early on in the article, before reviewing the relevant literature. Regardless of where the current study is discussed, the literature review should be organized around establishing what is known about the topic and how the current study will add to the extant knowledge base. A basic, and *flexible*, guide to the key sections of the Introduction is as follows: (a) theoretical framework initially guiding the study, (b) literature review (beginning with an introduction to the topic), (c) the current study, and (d) research questions. An alternative organizational strategy might be (a) literature review, (b) the current study, (c) research questions, and (d) theoretical framework. Or, finally, (a) the current study, (b) research questions, (c) theoretical framework, and (d) literature review. The exact organization of the Introduction will depend on the authors, their goals, and the focus of the article. Furthermore, authors should also consult the journal (e.g., *JMF*) for examples of different organizational formats as well as examples of qualitative manuscript content and presentation.

Theoretical Framework

It may be helpful to think of theory as at the “center” of the qualitative research process (Gilgun, 1992; Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Indeed, even if qualitative researchers have the goal of *generating* theory through the process of data collection and analysis (e.g., if they are using a grounded-theory methodology), they have also first conceptualized the study within a particular theoretical tradition. In other words, the qualitative research process revolves around, and draws from, theory at every step, including situating the need for the study, establishing the study focus and research questions, interviewing participants, observing in the field, analyzing and interpreting the data, and writing up the data (Creswell, 2008). In turn, specifying the theory or clusters of theories (i.e., theoretical framework) that informed the selection of the research design, the framing of the study, the research questions, and the data analysis is essential. Our use of the term *theoretical framework*, then, refers to the explicit statement of the particular school(s) of thought from which the concepts used in the study were derived and how

they are integrated to build a case for the current study. (For a more detailed description of the history of theoretical frameworks in family studies, see R. Hill & Hansen, 1960, and Klein & Jurich, 1993; for a description of the current use of theoretical frameworks in family studies, see Bengtson, Acock, Allen, Dilworth-Anderson, & Klein, 2005.)

Authors have the opportunity to build on the rich tradition in qualitative research of grounding their work theoretically not only within the historically influential Chicago School of Symbolic Interactionism (LaRossa & Wolf, 1985; Rosenblatt & Fischer, 1993) but also within a variety of emerging critical, narrative, phenomenological, interpretivist, feminist, postmodern, and other theoretical lenses, thus demonstrating how diverse theoretical frameworks can be integrated to shed light on the unexplored, complex, and/or well-developed phenomena that will be examined in the current study (Crotty, 2003; Daly, 2007). For example, in a study of financial inequality among adult siblings, Connidis (2007) integrated sociological ambivalence theory (Connidis & McMullin, 2002) with life course, feminist, and social constructionist perspectives (Walker, Allen, & Connidis, 2005) to examine change and conflict in adult sibling relationships, one of the most complex and longest lasting family ties. The pairing of a cluster of theories and qualitative family research methods using “people’s private behaviors, feelings, thoughts, understandings, meanings, and perceptions in the family context” not only offered new light on a neglected topic but also revealed “the unity of theory and method” (Rosenblatt & Fischer, 1993, p. 175).

However, theorizing in qualitative research can be challenging to do, as LaRossa (2012) observed in reflecting on his work as a recent deputy editor for *JMF*, a role in which he handled oversight of the majority of qualitative research submissions to the journal. Scholars (e.g., Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008) often explicitly recognize that researchers enter the field with sensitizing concepts and theoretical lenses that they should acknowledge. Yet, at the same time, there is little agreement on what constitutes good theorizing as well as controversy about whether and to what extent it should be guiding a study (see Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; LaRossa, 2005; Wertz et al., 2011). Our view is that a lack of *explicit* theorizing at the beginning of the study has

the potential to undermine the strength of the presentation and interpretation of findings as well as the theoretical contribution of the study.

Authors may choose to discuss the theoretical framework that guided their study before or after the literature review. The placement of the theoretical framework depends on issues such as the topic, study goals, how much emphasis is given to sensitizing concepts in guiding the study from the beginning, and author preferences for organizing the article.

Literature Review

In organizing the literature review, it is important for authors to keep in mind that the beginning of the article opens the door to engaging the readers’ attention. Thus, it is a good idea to begin with a clear and compelling statement of the issue under investigation and why it is important. The statement of the rationale for the current study may be only one to two sentences, but, regardless of length, it should foreground or provide context for the literature that follows.

The purpose of the literature review is to provide concise, relevant background information for the current study. In many cases, authors will need to review several, possibly disparate, literatures (e.g., by topic, by discipline) in order to provide the proper foundation for their study. It is the authors’ job to show the readers how these various literatures relate to and inform the current investigation. For example, consider a group of authors who have conducted a qualitative study of lesbian women’s experiences of intimate partner violence (IPV). The authors may wish to review the literatures on (a) IPV among heterosexual couples and (b) lesbian couples’ relationship functioning and quality and then (c) end with an overview of the few studies that have been focused on lesbian women and IPV. We have found it useful to conceptualize this strategy like a funnel; that is, it begins by reviewing the key research in the broadest sense, and about which most of the studies have been done (e.g., IPV with heterosexual couples); then it focuses more closely on lesbian couples in particular; and then, finally, it narrows into the specific topic under investigation—lesbian couples and IPV—an area about which there is likely to be the least amount of literature. This funneling helps provide authors with a solid foundation for situating the current study.

Conversely, authors may wish to organize the literature review not by topic but by approach or disciplinary perspective, in particular when a great deal of research has already been conducted and the study is approaching the topic in a new way. Regarding the same example (IPV in lesbian couples), relevant yet disparate literatures from psychological, sociological, feminist, and clinical perspectives may be important to review, all of which shed different light on a similar topic. Whatever the method of organizing the literature review, part of what makes an article “work” is the authors’ ability to select the most relevant findings and position them in a new way. Ending with a more narrow and precise focus on the research that exists on the topic under investigation is a good way to establish the need for the current study.

In essence, the goal of the literature review is to highlight both what is known and what is not known about the specific topic related to the current study. The literature review should address the following questions: What is the existing scholarly/empirical context of what is known about the subject matter? What are the gaps in the literature(s)? How will the current study fill those gaps?

Regarding citations, it is important to cite enough literature to be comprehensive, but it is not necessary to be exhaustive. Authors may find that it is necessary to cite one or two recent literature reviews when discussing topics about which a great deal is known (e.g., IPV in heterosexual couples) but find that it is most appropriate to cite primary sources (i.e., empirical studies) when discussing topics or subtopics about which little is known (e.g., IPV in lesbian couples). Like the Results section of a qualitative research article, the literature review tells a story—but it is an abbreviated and tightly knit story of how the topic(s) at hand emerged in the literature and then how the current topic has evolved and developed out of that broader context. In turn, in telling the story, authors need to demonstrate that they have “mastery of the relevant literatures” (Huy, 2012, p. 285) in the type of citations they include. They cannot include everything, but they have to give the readers confidence that they have a deep knowledge of the literature at hand and that the readers can trust their summary and organization of it.

Likewise, authors should not describe study after study after study in order to establish their knowledge of the literature. Instead, within each

section or subsection of the literature review, the relevant empirical research should be *synthesized*, such that the readers have a general sense of the findings and any deviations from general trends. For example, the authors might note that “most research has found modest declines in relationship quality across the transition to parenthood” and follow this statement with appropriate citations. Authors should not give a detailed description of every study to find this, although they might give an example of one or two, in particular if these studies are especially timely, recent, or interesting. Then, the authors might note, “However, a few studies have described a pattern of improving or increased relationship quality across the transition to parenthood,” and cite such studies, along with one or two examples, if this point is particularly relevant to the current study.

The Current Study

By the end of the literature review it should be clear to the readers why the current study is necessary, unique, and significant; that is, it is important that the readers understand what the current study is about, how it will build on prior knowledge, how and why it is innovative, and what type of new knowledge it promises to contribute. These potential contributions can ultimately be returned to in the Discussion.

In discussing the current study, authors should consider—and communicate to the readers—why a qualitative study is appropriate to investigate the topic at hand. There are many reasons to use a qualitative approach to address a research problem (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Gilgun, 1992; Rosenblatt & Fischer, 1993). It is generally easier to establish the utility of qualitative methods if little is known about the topic, the topic is particularly sensitive for participants to reveal, or the group of individuals under investigation is particularly hard to access or difficult to find. In other words, qualitative methods are recognized as particularly well suited for exploratory work on phenomena or groups that are highly complex and/or have rarely been the subject of formal empirical investigation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Charmaz, 2006; Rosenblatt & Fischer, 1993). Yet qualitative methods are also appropriate for understanding a topic about which a great deal is known and/or where research has become “balkanized among scholars employing different

theoretical approaches, methodologies, or disciplinary perspectives” (Sassler, 2010, p. 557). For example, much of the research on change in marriage across the transition to parenthood has been quantitative; that is, the literature has been heavily focused on documenting patterns of and predictors of change in marital quality (Sassler, 2010). A scholar might highlight how this relatively narrow focus has left many questions unanswered or point out that there are discrepancies and contradictions across the published literature on the topic (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 22), which can be best addressed using qualitative methods (Sassler, 2010). Thus, it is possible to come up with creative and important research questions on a topic that has been saturated by quantitative studies or overlooked in other kinds of approaches and that can most effectively be answered using qualitative methods.

Indeed, whereas quantitative methods can be particularly useful in enabling family scholars to compare different groups (e.g., married husbands’ and wives’ relationship quality) and/or examine how different factors or variables relate to each other (e.g., whether marital satisfaction and sexual intimacy are correlated), qualitative methods can be instrumental in enabling scholars to explore process and meaning in family life (e.g., how men and women describe, make meaning of, and construct their relationships over time). In this way, qualitative methods enable the researcher to more fully describe a phenomenon, such as marital quality (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Such descriptions, if rendered with nuance and rich detail, may in turn have more resonance with the readers than summaries of quantitative data inasmuch as they provide important information about lived experience as well as insight into participants’ private experiences and their subjectivities of their families (Rosenblatt & Fischer, 1993). As Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted, “If you want people to understand better than they otherwise might, provide them information in the form in which they usually experience it” (p. 120).

Likewise, in describing their choice of qualitative methods, authors might also address why they selected the specific qualitative method that they used (e.g., semistructured interviews, participant observation, ethnographic research, content analysis of personal documents; Matthews, 2005; Rosenblatt & Fischer, 1993). For example, they might explain

that their choice of in-depth, semistructured interviews reflects their social constructionist theoretical perspective inasmuch as their goal is to elicit and interpret individuals’ perspectives and experiences of meaning making (Charmaz, 2006; Crotty, 2003); that is, from a social constructionist perspective, individuals’ narratives about their lives are complex and often contradictory and are better captured through the interactional exchange between interviewees and interviewers rather than as numbers on a scale that are reduced to group averages (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). In a second example, if participant observation is the primary method used, the authors might explain their choice to spend considerable time establishing multiple relationships with an array of informants and observing within a natural setting in order to develop a “social scientific understanding” of the situation at hand (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006, p. 17).

Research Questions

In the Introduction (e.g., after a brief introductory section, toward the front end or, alternatively, at or near the conclusion of the Introduction), the authors should clearly communicate the research questions that their study aims to answer as well as how these questions are informed by the literature review (including gaps in current knowledge; i.e., the “problem statement”) and the theoretical framework. The research questions should address a topic that will generate meaningful data and have rich relevance for the people studied. For an example, see Goldberg and Allen’s (2007) article, which describes their study of lesbian mothers’ perspectives on male involvement and male role models for their children. After reviewing the broader literatures on the influence of fatherhood as well as father absence on child developmental outcomes and the few studies that have explored gender socialization in lesbian-mother families, the authors posed three research questions, which were shaped by these literatures and their feminist theoretical perspective: (a) How do lesbians who are becoming mothers think about male involvement? (b) Why do men matter to lesbian women who are becoming mothers? (c) Who are the men that women want to be involved in their children’s lives? These questions were framed in such a way that they reflected the

paucity of research on how lesbian women conceptualize and approach male involvement as well as the authors' feminist approach to family research whereby issues of gender, power, and context were of central concern in their inquiry (Ferree, 1990; Fox & Murray, 2000).

As a general guideline, research questions should be few (e.g., three to five) and fairly general. This ensures that the focus is on "learning information from participants, rather than learning what the researcher seeks to know" (Creswell, 2008, p. 143). Creswell (2008) further suggested that research questions may be framed around a central question, which emphasizes the main phenomenon that one wishes to explore, such as, for example, "How do gay fathers experience their parental identity?" The author might also generate several subquestions, which are more narrowly focused and help the author answer the larger question of interest (e.g., "What are the key contexts or individuals that gay fathers draw on to make sense of their identity as parents?"). The research questions should cohere around a central topic or related topics and should be focused enough that they can be addressed in a 35- to 40-page qualitative article. Indeed, in publishing data from a qualitative dissertation, for example, it is usually inappropriate to try to address all of one's research questions in a single manuscript (Bowen, 2005). A better strategy is to choose one significant "dimension or outcome on which to focus," in particular those that are relevant to the journal to which one is submitting (Bowen, 2005, p. 866).

It is important to note that research questions are typically distinct from interview questions; that is, one's central research question would likely not be part of the interview script. However, some of the subquestions might be appropriately rephrased to be accessible to one's audience (Creswell, 2008). In addition, in designing research questions, it may also be helpful to start with words like *how* and *what*, because such questions may lend themselves particularly well to the exploration of a phenomenon (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Gubrium & Holstein, 1997).

METHOD

In terms of length, the Method should represent about 20% of the overall manuscript (or about seven pages in a 35-page manuscript). There is a great deal of material to be covered in the

Method section, yet authors should aim for a balance between clarity and brevity. Too little detail can raise questions about transparency and rigor, but too much detail can seem trivial (this is especially true for new authors when translating theses or dissertations into research articles). Although writing up the Method section may seem more formulaic than other parts of a qualitative research article, it still requires careful attention to the task of providing enough transparent information to judge the integrity of the study. The key is to translate the sense that "we will know when we see it" (i.e., a good qualitative study) into the practical strategies that help produce it. The Method section of an article typically consists of several sections: (a) the participants (or the sample), (b) procedure/data collection, (c) interview questions (if relevant to the study), and (d) data analysis.

The Participants/the Sample

The Method section typically begins by specifying the source or type of data. In much of qualitative family research, the data are interview transcripts, but in other cases authors may be drawing on other types of data, including observational data, newspaper articles or headlines, conversations in an online/Internet chat forum, and historical documents (e.g., Matthews, 2005; Piercy & Benson, 2005; Rosenblatt & Fischer, 1993; van Eeden-Moorefield & Proulx, 2009). Then, the key characteristics of the sample (or other data sources) are typically described (although, in our experience, reviewers have occasionally suggested that the descriptive details about the sample should be presented at the beginning of the Results section). For example, authors typically include information about the number of participants in the study (e.g., "15 heterosexual married women were interviewed, along with 11 of their husbands") as well as other key elements of the sample, such as the age range of participants, their stage in the life course (e.g., heterosexual couples making their first transition to parenthood), geographic context, racial/ethnic membership, and number of times they were assessed or interviewed. Interview modality (phone vs. in person, conjoint vs. individual) should also be specified.

Procedure/Data Collection

It is usually appropriate for authors to identify the data collection strategies used, in order of

relevance or importance. For example, they may first describe how participants were recruited (e.g., via childbirth education classes, the Internet, elementary schools, Gay Pride events) and then the procedure for collecting data (e.g., one 45- to 60-minute semistructured in-person interview at the participant's home). Information about who collected the data and procedures for obtaining informed consent are also typically specified (Schoenberg, Miller, & Pruchno, 2011). Authors may also wish to consider providing a brief justification of why particular recruitment or data collection strategies were used. Furthermore, they may wish to address the potential strengths and weaknesses of such strategies (Schoenberg, Shenk, & Kart, 2007; Schoenberg et al., 2011). For example, if telephone interviews were used, it may be helpful to justify why this data collection method was the most reasonable and appropriate for the sample and for the type of data desired; in turn, the authors may wish to cite an authoritative source on this topic. Likewise, if partners in a couple were interviewed together, as opposed to separately, it may be helpful to explain the rationale for this approach as well as its advantages (e.g., it may provide insight into how partners co-construct their own stories and realities as well as revealing points of tension and/or conflicting perspectives; Goldberg, 2009; Valentine, 1999). Authors should also consider, and make transparent for the readers, the type of constraints on data collection that were present. For example, authors may have used telephone interviews in order to meet their goal of securing a diverse sample from multiple locations (see, e.g., Goldberg, 2009).

Finally, authors may wish to consider and discuss their own positionality in relation to the subject matter in general and the participants specifically (i.e., if they personally interviewed or observed the participants). For example, if the author is a White woman who interviewed men of color about their experiences of parenting, she might discuss how racial and gender dynamics may have explicitly and implicitly shaped what was said and not said in the interview (Pini, 2005). Furthermore, the specific intersection of researcher identities (e.g., gender, race, social class, sexual orientation) and their implications for the interviewee-interviewer dynamic may warrant attention and exploration. For example, an author might address how her status as a White, well-educated female affected how

low-income women of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds responded to her and the interview questions (e.g., what assumptions did the interviewees appear to make about her, how did she respond, and how did such interactions shape the interview? McClure, 2007). By extension, authors should also discuss, if relevant, how shared statuses (e.g., ethnicity, gender, race, sexual orientation) between the researcher and respondents may have shaped the interview process and content. By enhancing trust and making it easy to establish rapport, such commonalities might facilitate greater sharing on the part of participants (Bhopal, 2010); although, as Few, Stephens, and Rouse-Arnett (2003) pointed out, shared statuses do not automatically guarantee rapport and understanding between interviewer and interviewee.

Authors may also provide a rationale or explanation for the sample size of their study. In other words, depending on the type of data analysis process they used and the epistemological framework undergirding the study, they may wish to explain how they reached saturation for the current study (e.g., Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 143). Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggested that saturation is, at the very least, the point at which new data are no longer forthcoming in the data collection process or "the point when a researcher confirms a pattern of findings" (Roy, 2012, p. 661), whereas Charmaz (2006), a social constructivist, is critical of the concept of saturation. Regardless of authors' perspective on saturation, we suggest that if they choose to discuss saturation, they should go beyond simply stating that saturation was reached. Specifically, authors should provide a compelling reason for and example of how the research team knew that they had enough data for the analysis process in order to develop the resulting concepts, variations, and relationships among concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Again, saturation may not be the goal; it depends on the type of qualitative analysis that the author used (see Roy, Zvonkovic, Goldberg, Sharp, & LaRossa, 2015).

Interview Questions

If the primary materials being subjected to analysis are interview transcripts, it is important to describe the interview questions that were analyzed for the current study. In doing so, authors should consider giving a sense of the range of questions asked of participants and

give examples of several substantive questions (Hunt, 2011). For example, in a qualitative study that focused on the experiences and perceptions of college-educated unmarried women, participants were asked to describe what it was like to have never been married at their age and to describe their thoughts about marriage and their expectations of marriage (Sharp & Ganong, 2007). In addition to describing the interview questions, authors might also consider stating that participants provided demographic information as well, with the goal of giving the readers both a sense of (a) the major substantive questions that were subject to qualitative analysis as well as (b) other, additional questions that were asked, which may not be the focus of the current qualitative article but that were a part of the larger study (e.g., on unmarried women). Explicitly providing the framework for eliciting data aids readers in evaluating content that was both prompted by the researcher and emergent from the participant. This advice is also true for other forms of data, such as field study notes used in participant observation. In this case, substantive examples should be given of how the researcher conceptualized and framed the recording of their observations and ethnographic field notes (Emerson et al., 1995).

If relevant, it is also useful to describe, briefly, the type of interview approach that was used (e.g., structured, semistructured, unstructured, conversational; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Holstein & Gubrium, 2003; Lofland et al., 2006). For example, the authors should specify whether standard probes/follow-up questions were used (a more structured approach) or whether interviewers were encouraged to follow topical trajectories or “branches” in the conversation that might stray from the interview guide but are relevant to the research questions (a more semistructured approach).

It is worth noting that some journals and reviewers prefer that authors provide more of the larger context of the major study from which the current study derives, such that they include questions from the main interview schedule, as opposed to only those that were focused on in the data analysis described in the current article. Others, however, prefer a more focused approach, whereby authors list only those questions that were examined in the current study. Our guidepost is to be transparent in whatever choice is made.

Data Analysis

In a qualitative article, the authors’ description of their data analysis process and procedure is paramount. The data analysis section is where authors provide the readers with the concrete tools and, more important, the “analytic journey” used, to identify “the essence or meaning of data” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, pp. 160–161). The goal is to generate an understanding of how the analysis was done in order to engender trust in and understanding of the story that the authors will tell about the data (K. R. Allen, 2000; Charmaz, 2006; Daly, 2007; LaRossa, 2005; Morrow, 2005). In essence, the authors’ responsibility is to show the readers how they got from the data to the findings (Pratt, 2009). Our practice of qualitative data analysis is to explicitly acknowledge that several overarching elements are brought to the table when conducting the analysis. These components include (a) the initial theoretical framework and research questions guiding the study; (b) the sensitizing concepts derived from the literature review; (c) the researcher’s positionality and initial insights; and (d) the data themselves, which have typically been obtained via several sources (e.g., interview questions, field notes, demographic questionnaires).

First, authors should consider identifying the type of qualitative design that they used, given the range of qualitative methods that exist (Frost et al., 2010; Rosenblatt & Fischer, 1993), and they should clearly articulate how and why this particular design was suitable for answering their particular research questions as well as how the selection of this design was informed by and is reflected in their interview questions and/or measures. Was it a thematic analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Braun & Clarke, 2006), grounded-theory analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), interpretive phenomenological analysis (Crotty, 2003; Smith, 1996, 2004), narrative analysis (Sarbin, 1986), or some other approach? Then, regardless of the type of qualitative design that was used, authors will typically describe the stages of coding and analysis, example(s) of each stage of coding, and the process of reaching the final coding scheme. They may also describe whether, and how, they incorporated the demographic characteristics of the sample into the data analysis process. For example, were participant gender, sexual orientation, social class, work status,

marital status, age, and other factors considered in developing the codes and emergent themes?

Establishing trustworthiness via transparent description of the coding process. We recommend that authors seek to establish the trustworthiness (e.g., authenticity, legitimacy, validity) of the coding process using not only criteria appropriate for qualitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morrow, 2005) but also language and terms (e.g., rigor) that can be understood by quantitative researchers, given that many readers of *JMF* and other family journals are quantitative scholars (Ambert et al., 1995). *Trustworthiness*, or *rigor*, can be defined as “the means by which we demonstrate integrity and competence, a way of demonstrating the legitimacy of the research process” (Tobin & Begley, 2004, p. 390). Transparency is fundamental to the demonstration of rigor. It is generally better to discuss in detail, with examples, the steps of the coding process, rather than simply stating that the data were “analyzed using qualitative methods” and asserting that “a coding scheme was developed.” As Dickie (2003) pointed out, terms like *open* and *axial coding* (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) are sometimes used as though they were an analysis of variance or *t* test. Likewise, *triangulation* (consistency of findings across methods and data sources) and *member checking* (informant feedback or respondent validation) are sometimes “presented as prescriptions for trustworthiness of both data analysis, without further description of what these processes entailed, or how discrepancies were resolved” (Dickie, 2003, p. 51; Morrow, 2005). As Dickie (2003) asserted,

If an author writes of coding, I want to know something about the codes—what they were, perhaps; how they were selected; how the author used them. Codes may have “emerged” from the data, but I suspect they were more likely to “emerge” from the researcher’s mind and in either case some decisions were made about what mattered and what didn’t. I want to know about that process—what the researcher was *thinking*. Labels don’t convey this. (p. 51)

Dickie (2003) later elaborated:

The development and explication of the categories that are defined through reading and coding the data can become the “secret world” of the

researcher, where magic does indeed take place but is never shared. But it shouldn’t be that way. We need to learn what the labels and jargon mean, then throw out the terms and describe what we do. We need to tell the research story, including the challenges of data analysis and how we resolved them, to support our interpretations. (p. 55)

Thus, as Dickie suggested, discussion of both the messy and magical aspects of coding should be not avoided but presented in a way that illuminates the coding process as detailed, complex, and systematic. In this way, the messiness of the data should not be treated as synonymous with or as an excuse for a messy article. It is the author’s responsibility to communicate the “messiness” of the data in a way that is detailed (i.e., the readers should not have to take the author’s word that it was messy) as well as clear (i.e., the data should be represented in such a way that the Results section is organized and digestible).

As stated, it is often appropriate to provide examples of each of the stages of coding and to illustrate the process of moving from one stage to the next. For the purpose of illustration, the following is an excerpt from Goldberg and Kivalanka’s (2012) study of how young adults with lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) parents think about and perceive themselves as affected by, marriage (in)equality:

First, we engaged in line-by-line analysis to generate initial theoretical categories (Charmaz, 2006). For example, we generated the initial codes “advocate of marriage equality” and “not an advocate of marriage equality” to describe individuals’ general stance on marriage equality. As we moved to focused coding, we refined these codes. For example, the code “not an advocate of marriage equality” was replaced with three separate codes: (a) “critical of marriage as an institution,” (b) “critical of the fight for marriage equality,” and (c) “mitigated support due to ambivalence about LGB parents’ sexuality.” We further specified our codes by developing subcodes that denoted information about participants’ interpretations of how or why they feel a particular way (e.g., some participants attributed their critical stance toward marriage to their geographic context and privilege). (p. 40)

(See Abrego, 2009, and R. E. S. Allen and Wiles, 2013, for other illustrations.)

Of note here is that, although qualitative data analysis is typically conceptualized as occurring in stages, the exact number and name of these stages vary. For example, in the example above,

Goldberg and Kivalanka (2012) referred to “open coding” and “focused coding”; other authors refer to “open coding,” “axial coding,” and “selective coding” (see LaRossa, 2005). Whatever stages of coding authors choose to use, it is important to not only name them but also to describe them so that the readers can understand their meaning in the context of the current project.

Discussing the role of the researcher(s) in the coding and analysis process. In addition to providing details about the “what” of the data analysis it is also appropriate for authors to provide details about the “whom,” namely, who was involved in the coding and analysis of data (e.g., graduate students; the principal investigator; other authors/collaborators). Were the coders trained? How? What method(s) of establishing agreement among coders (if there was more than one) were used, and what method(s) of resolving disagreements among coders were used? Although *JMF* does not require authors to calculate interrater agreement on codes, as some journals do (Frieze, 2013), there is an expectation that, at the very least, authors discuss in narrative form the process of how the coders managed and resolved coding differences.

Finally, the authors may wish to go beyond simply identifying the individuals involved in coding and analysis by explicitly addressing researcher positionality and reflexivity (K. R. Allen, 2000; Gilgun, 2013; LaRossa, 2005; Morrow, 2005); that is, depending on the authors’ preferences, style, and relevance to the topic under investigation, they may find it appropriate to share their “approach to subjectivity; any assumptions, expectations, and biases [they] bring to the investigation; . . . how reflexive processes affected the analysis; . . . and how . . . power [was] managed among researchers” (Morrow, 2005, p. 259). By including a reflexive component, researchers make their own approach transparent, including their investment or stake in the research they have conducted (Dickie, 2003). Reflexivity provides an opportunity for researchers to use their own experience to create a bridge between science and art by illuminating the spaces between the particular and the general (see K. R. Allen, 2007); this approach may also help infuse meaningfulness and life into the research report, thus rendering the report more readable (K. R. Allen, 2000; Gilgun, 2013; Guba & Lincoln,

2005). Citing appropriate references that highlight the purpose and meaning of a reflexive approach may be useful in anticipating reviewer questions about why the researcher is including “personal information” in an academic manuscript.

RESULTS

Thus far, we have presented practical guideposts for communicating the key components of a qualitative study in a relatively brief research document (i.e., a journal article). We have tried to make it clear that each station along the way requires authors to convince the readers that the conceptualization, justification, and methodology of their project are in competent hands. By demonstrating that they are in command of the methodological process, authors can gain the readers’ trust, thus enabling them to appreciate and be convinced by the presentation of findings.

The Results section is the “main event” of the article. All of the carefully constructed material in the Introduction and Method has prepared readers to launch into the results with openness and confidence that they are about to learn something new about the topic and understand it in a deeper, more complex, and nuanced way. At the beginning of the Results section, the readers should be excited to learn about what the authors have found and should be prepared to be “wowed” by the authors’ contribution.

It is often useful to provide an overview or road map of the findings in the beginning of the Results section. It is here that authors can briefly illustrate for the readers how the Results section is organized and how the different components of the results fit together or tell a story. Regarding length, the Results section should typically constitute approximately 30%–35% of the overall manuscript (about 10–13 pages of a 35-page manuscript).

Presentation of the Data

Authors face the important task of effectively summarizing the vast amount of data that they have collected and subjected to qualitative analysis. As Ambert et al. (1995) noted, this summary can be expressed in a variety of ways “depending both on the topic researched and the author’s epistemology—for instance, via typologies, categories, quantifications, charts, or graphic presentations, as well as using the informants’

words quoted verbatim” (p. 884; see also Miles & Huberman, 1994). A table documenting the number of participants who endorsed each theme, for example, is one way to summarize the data (Frieze, 2013). Alternatively, a figure summarizing the grounded theory or the relationships among key concepts that emerged from the data may also be appropriate (see, e.g., Burton, Cherlin, Winn, Estacion, & Holder-Taylor, 2009; Ganong, Coleman, & Jamison, 2011; Goldberg, Downing, & Richardson, 2009).

In addition to presenting the data succinctly, authors should seek to present the data coherently; that is, it is not sufficient to simply present a list of themes or a table that summarizes the number of participants who endorsed a particular theme. Instead, it is the authors’ responsibility to illustrate how these themes fit together and relate to one another. Authors should seek to communicate a “data-based story/narrative, ‘map,’ framework, or underlying structure for the phenomenon or domain” (Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999, p. 223). Elliott et al. (1999) presented examples of “poor practice” and “good practice” in this regard:

Examples of poor practice: The authors of a grounded theory study of the experience of living with head injury present results as a list of 23 distinct categories, without any attempt to organize the categories into larger groups or underlying dimensions. The reader’s head swims while trying to make sense of the mélange of categories, which refer to different levels of abstraction and different aspects of the phenomenon; furthermore, some seem to overlap, whereas others describe contradictory experiences.

Examples of good practice: The authors present an integrated summary of their analysis, using a figure with boxes and arrows to depict both the temporal–sequential (before–early–later living with) and the logical–hierarchical relationships (using “effective agent self” to link initiating and self-reflective aspects of agency) among categories. Similar and temporally organized categories are grouped in such a way as to display these relationships. The authors also provide a verbal narrative of their model and organize their presentation around a rich, memorably-named “core category” or “constitutive feature” (i.e., losing and rebuilding an effective agent self). (p. 223)

Thus, as Elliott et al. highlighted, authors must find a way to represent the data such that the categories and codes that emerge are distinct, their relationships to each other are

clearly specified, and the findings as a whole are well integrated and clearly communicated. The presentation, depending on the outcome of the data analysis process, might be a classification of participants’ differential responses to divorce, presented as “types” with corresponding characteristics (e.g., stressful, ambivalent, not affected). Conversely, the purpose of the study could have been to generate a theory about some process (e.g., the stages that recently divorced individuals go through in making sense of their dissolved relationship and changed future), and thus the data are presented in the form of a conceptual model and descriptive text.

One question that is often raised regarding the presentation of qualitative findings is whether numbers, or counts, of themes should be used. Sandelowski (2001) suggested that qualitative researchers often align themselves as either “anti-number” or “pro-number,” with the anti-number camp arguing that counting themes is antithetical to the goals of qualitative work, which is to engage in-depth examination of process and meaning (and not simply replicate the work of quantitative researchers) and the pro-number camp arguing that the numbers can help establish the frequency of how often a phenomenon occurs as well as to illustrate the labor and complexity of qualitative work. Lofland and colleagues (2006), for example, argued that there are good reasons for “counting”: It keeps the researcher analytically honest, and it provides evidence of the frequency with which events or behaviors are truly occurring in the emerging categories. On the other hand, Daly (2007) observed that counting is not appropriate if theoretical sampling and emergent design principles are used, explaining that “the frequency of response is directly related to the frequency of the question. If we are strategically asking the question in some interviews and not others as a way of building theory, then frequency [reveals little about the salience of the category]” (p. 234). Authors should familiarize themselves with the arguments for and against counting and should be prepared to provide a rationale for their approach—if not in their original manuscript, then possibly in response to a reviewer’s critiques.

Use of Participant Quotes

In many cases, the data that were subjected to qualitative analysis were interview transcripts,

and thus quotations represent the best illustration of the findings. Participant quotes are ideally used to illustrate themes or to capture a particular type or category of participants. In other words, they should be selected to exemplify what authors are describing (e.g., the concept of “playing hard to get,” the experience of “falling off the wagon,” a category of parents who are “happy empty nesters”) and will ideally both bring the findings to life and also speak to the “thickness” and richness of the data (Charmaz, 2006; Geertz, 1973; Rubel & Villalba, 2009). Pratt (2008, 2009) distinguished between “power quotes” and “proof quotes.” He suggested that power quotes, which should go in the body of the Results section, “are the most compelling bits of data you have, the ones that effectively illustrate your points” (Pratt, 2009, p. 860). Power quotes are those that best highlight the most salient features of the data and give the reader a “sense of being there, of visualizing the [participant], feeling their conflict and emotions” (Ambert et al., 1995, p. 885). At the same time, authors should also have plenty of proof quotes for each power quote that appears in the Results; that is, they should be able to back up each point or argument with multiple participant quotes (these may be summarized in a table; Pratt, 2009; see R. E. S. Allen & Wiles, 2013, for an example).

To be most effective, quotes should be used to illustrate a given theme or phenomenon, but they should not dominate the Results section. In other words, a good Results section begins by describing a theme in sufficiently rich and descriptive detail that it stands on its own without quotes. The quotes are presented as illustrations of that theme (or concept or class of participants). In a poorly written Results section, the quotes are strung together and interspersed by very little text. In other words, there is very little data analysis and abstraction.

At the same time that the Results section should not be dominated by quotes, it is often necessary and appropriate to provide more than one quote to illustrate a particular concept or theme in order to capture or convey the richness and diversity within that particular category, including the range of participant perspectives, experiences, and views. Use of only one quote to illustrate a particular concept or theme might unintentionally give the reader the impression that “little variation in views or type of expression was found” (Drisko, 2005, p. 592). Because

manuscript length is usually limited by journal submission guidelines, authors thus face the challenging task of selecting and excerpting quotes. Indeed, to conserve space, authors may choose to excerpt the most relevant text from a longer quote. Although quotes should not be edited so heavily that the context of the remaining quote is unclear or the holistic nature of the quote is lost, it is often useful to edit quotes so that the most relevant or significant points are not overshadowed by the surrounding text. If authors edit or condense a quotation, it is appropriate to insert indicators of such deletions (e.g., ellipses) to show where portions of text were removed. Again, authors should aim to find a balance in editing quotes and maintaining the integrity of the participants’ own words, because participants are the authors’ “partners” in telling the story of the data.

Care should be taken in the selection of quotes; that is, authors should review their manuscript carefully to ensure that they are providing evidence of themes from a wide range of participants. They should not repeatedly quote the same individual(s) at the exclusion of others. If a disproportionate number of quotes come from one person, this might give the impression that the authors are selectively choosing only the most exceptional quotes, “cherry-picking” the ones that support their idea(s), and/or selecting quotes from only the very few participants whose interviews were rich enough to generate quotable material.

Finally, providing context for quotes is also important; that is, to contextualize a given quote, it may be relevant to provide a pseudonym for the participant who said it, along with that individual’s age, gender, race, sexual orientation, or other key participant demographics or details (depending on the focus of the study, the interpretive lens, etc.). For example, in a qualitative study of nonresident Russian fathers, the author provided details about the relationship status of the men (separated, divorced), their occupation, and their children (e.g., age, gender) when quoting from them (Utrata, 2008).

Integration of Theory

Explicit attention to theory is important in presenting research findings. As noted above, we recommend that authors explicitly acknowledge the theoretical framework they have chosen as an interpretive lens for understanding and

explaining their findings. In turn, it is important for authors to be transparent about how they are drawing on and infusing their guiding theoretical framework throughout the Results section. For example, a study that is framed by a feminist intersectional perspective would explicitly acknowledge the ways in which individuals, both disadvantaged and privileged, actively engage the social processes, cultural discourses, and institutional structures of inequality that shape their identities (Ferree, 2010). Likewise, a study of stay-at-home working-class fathers would address how these men are contending with the cultural discourse of the male breadwinner mandate and the economic need for two incomes. The guiding theoretical perspective of feminism would be used to interpret how men are shaped by, resist, and conform with these ideologies and systems of power in the context of their individual identities and marital and parental relationships.

The concept of *thick description* illuminates the way to communicate the connection of theory and results in the Results section. *Thick description* refers to the authors' task of integrating both descriptive and interpretive commentary when presenting qualitative findings (Geertz, 1973; Ponterrotto & Grieger, 2007). In the example above, the descriptive content would include dynamic struggle with discourses and practices, and it would be interpreted, in part, with the guiding feminist lens. Thick description is often viewed as necessary to ensure *transferability*: the notion that other scholars have sufficient information to apply the ideas to their own work and settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

At the same time that the theory guiding the study is central in organizing the findings, some scholars suggest that it is helpful to be "cognizant of the differences between description and interpretation," as this will help to "fortify the credibility of your interpretations of your study" (Choudhuri, Glaser, & Peregoy, 2004, p. 445). Thus, when presenting the data authors should aim to communicate how and when their interpretive lens is being used to understand, explain, and draw forth insights from the data such that, for example, readers could presumably see how a different theoretical framework might be applied to the same data with different conclusions. In other words, it is potentially useful to carefully "qualify our observations to clearly indicate [that they are]

inference[s]" (Wolcott, 1990, p. 32). The key point is for authors to incorporate the theoretical ideas that are guiding the study, both before the data were collected and during the data analysis and presentation of findings, in order to render the construction of the findings transparent and transferable. Of course, some authors may choose to do more of the integration of theory in the Discussion section, which is another way in which the organization of the article may vary.

One of the challenges in writing the Results section is deciding whether, how, and to what degree one should contrast the results with the previous literature. Some authors will elect not to cite prior literature in the Results section, because they think it may distract or detract from the current study's findings (Matthews, 2005). However, others may choose to incorporate some reference to prior work, because it serves as important contextualizing detail. (For an effective example of how to reference prior work in the Results section, see Nelson, 2006.) Because there is no standard way to approach this issue, authors should anticipate that reviewers will have different perspectives on it and thus will respond to their choice (i.e., to include prior literature in the Results or not) in different ways. Of note, though, is that if authors do choose to discuss prior literature in the Results section, then the Discussion will probably be noticeably shorter and will focus primarily on the conclusions and implications of the current study.

DISCUSSION

The discussion typically represents about 10%–20% of the overall manuscript (or about three to seven pages in a 35-page manuscript). As stated, the length, style, and content of the Discussion may vary in part on the basis of whether theoretical integration and prior literature have been addressed in the Results section as well as on the specifications, style, and format of the journal. But regardless of whether theory and prior research are emphasized in the Results or Discussion sections, it is not necessary to spend much time in the Discussion restating the study findings, because they will have been thoroughly illustrated in the previous section. Instead, the Discussion section provides the opportunity to interpret the novelty and transferability of the findings, both for the readers and for future research directions.

It is often helpful to organize the Discussion in terms of each of the major research questions; that is, for example, if the authors' research questions were (a) "How do older women construct or make sense of a recurrence of cancer?" and (b) "How do they draw on or utilize formal and informal supports when coping with a recurrence?" the authors might organize the Discussion around these two questions; that is, they might discuss first the findings or themes related to women's views of their cancer recurrence in light of the literature on coping with illness (and cancer specifically, as well as aging) and discuss second the findings related to social support in the context of prior research on formal and informal support networks, illness, and aging. Infused in the discussion of these findings would be the authors' guiding theoretical framework or frameworks (e.g., life course theory, social constructionism), which should be acknowledged at the beginning of the article. Alternatively, if the authors' goal was to go beyond the descriptive level to develop a theory of how older women construct their cancer experience, the Discussion might elaborate on the nuances and reach of the theory, perhaps highlighting both its theoretical and empirical implications (e.g., the extent to which the theory might be extended to men, or older adults in general, or constructions of illness in general; see K. R. Allen & Roberto, 2014).

Contribution

In revisiting the literature review in the context of discussing the results, authors should seek to establish how the current study's findings fit within the established literature. The "news," or contribution of the study—which may have been foregrounded in the Introduction—should be clear. In other words, what is the "value added"? What did the current study yield? How is readers' understanding of broad-level concepts (e.g., gender, family, technology, marriage, aging) enhanced by the current study? What remains to be known? What questions—generated or inspired by the current study—should future research tackle?

The article's major contribution may be primarily descriptive (e.g., we now understand more about the subjective experiences of transgender adults), or it may be primarily explanatory (e.g., we now have a model for understanding the process by which transgender adults form intimate relationships during and

after gender transition). Ideally, the ultimate contribution of the article fits with the authors' stated purpose (e.g., to describe an understudied group, to illustrate a complex process, or to generate a new theory). Sometimes, an article makes multiple contributions. For example, a study may make both a theoretical contribution (e.g., by proposing a theory of how lesbian women who pursue parenthood in middle age come to terms with their infertility) and an empirical contribution (e.g., providing insights into the experiences of middle-age, involuntarily childless lesbians, a group that has rarely been studied). A qualitative research article may also have methodological implications. For example, it may "call into question some of the traditional ways [a concept or phenomenon] has been measured and studied" (Manning & Smock, 2005, p. 1001).

In sum, the Discussion should not simply be a rehashing of the findings; it should go beyond the Results to clearly specify the meaning, innovation, and implications of the results of the study. In other words, the Results section reveals in rich detail the analytic result of synthesizing the guiding theory, sensitizing concepts, research questions, raw data, and researcher positionality. In the Discussion, the researcher translates the findings in light of other research that came before and proposes work that should come next. In the Results, themes and types are described. In the Discussion, the meaning and context of the themes and types are interpreted and critiqued. Ideally, the Discussion will communicate to the reader the innovativeness of the work or how it "transform[s] the coordinates by which a problem is usually understood" (Parker, 2004, p. 104).

Limitations

Toward the end of the Discussion section authors may wish to communicate the various ways in which the study was possibly limited and the implications of these limitations for the findings (Matthews, 2005; Pratt, 2009; Schoenberg et al., 2007). For example, authors might consider how issues of sample demographics (e.g., participant age, race, gender, social class, sexual orientation, life stage); methods of data collection (in-person interviews, telephone interviews, questionnaires, observational methods); the timing, nature, and number of data collection points; and recruitment strategies may have influenced the current study in

ways that could be enhanced or improved on in future research. If the sample comprised mainly White, middle-class heterosexual divorced mothers in the Northeast, the authors should consider and discuss how the race, class, and geographic context of the sample may have shaped their findings (e.g., the postdivorce legal proceedings and custody arrangements of middle-class women may be shaped by their relative access to financial resources). Likewise, if the authors recruited their sample of divorced women through support groups, they should consider how this recruitment method may have shaped the sample and the nature of the findings (e.g., divorced women who seek out support groups may be more distressed than divorced women in the general population). In turn, the authors might propose how future research could improve on the specific limitations of their study, perhaps generating specific research questions to be pursued in future work. Authors may wish to distinguish between future qualitative and quantitative studies in highlighting future research questions or areas to be explored.

Conclusions

Authors should aim to conclude with a brief, compelling description of the major conclusions that can be drawn from the current study as well as, possibly, their implications for theory or future research. The final concluding section should not be overly detailed; instead, it should summarize, in a general sense, the significance and meaning of the study. By ending on a crisp and decisive note, the authors leave the readers with a satisfying sense of having reached the end of an important and interesting article.

SUGGESTIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR SCHOLARS

Thus far, our recommendations have focused on providing guidelines for the presentation—and, it is hoped, eventual publication—of qualitative family research. Our focus has not been on how to conduct high-quality qualitative research, because this is simply beyond the scope and purpose of this article. However, we end by offering some additional guidelines for scholars who wish to develop competence in conducting as well as communicating and publishing qualitative methods. We emphasize newer resources

because these may be useful to scholars who are already familiar with the many excellent older (and, in some cases, out-of-date) resources for learning, conducting, and publishing qualitative research. We also emphasize select resources from fields outside of family studies (e.g., gerontology, nursing, occupational therapy) because we believe that these may be unfamiliar but potentially very useful to readers.

First, we suggest that scholars *consult published sources* that promote the self-learning of qualitative research methods. For example, Chenail (2011) presented a 10-page list of Internet resources, articles, chapters, and books on many types of qualitative data analysis. LaRossa (2005) provided an excellent description of grounded theory methodology. Braun and Clarke (2006), as well as Charmaz (2006), represented accessible resources for learning thematic analysis. A useful online resource for learning about qualitative research methods and data analysis is the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Qualitative Research Guidelines Project (<http://www.qualres.org/>). This online resource contains descriptions of common qualitative research paradigms and research traditions; common qualitative methods and analytical approaches; evaluative criteria for judging qualitative work; guidelines for reviewing qualitative reports; and guidelines for designing, analyzing, and reporting qualitative research.

Second, we believe that *consulting and reading books and articles that illustrate the effective deployment of qualitative data analysis* can also be helpful in terms of offering “models” for how to write up qualitative research. As Schoenberg et al. (2007) noted,

Enabling the participants to speak for themselves is among the most challenging and potentially powerful aspects of writing up qualitative studies. Effective qualitative writers make use of examples that accurately integrate the participants' own words with their social situation or context. The compelling use of insights from study participants to enhance analysis can be seen in two early classics, *Living and Dying at Murray Manor* (Gubrium, 1975) and *Speaking of Life: Horizons of Meaning for Nursing Home Residents* (Gubrium, 1993). (pp. 8–9)

In addition to the examples that Schoenberg et al. (2007) highlighted, we also suggest a few others that have been instrumental over the years in our own development as qualitative scholars.

Namely, we have found books such as *Halving it All: How Equally Shared Parenting Works* (Deutsch, 2000); *Black Intimacies: A Gender Perspective on Families and Relationships* (S. A. Hill, 2005); *Transition to Parenthood: How Infants Change Families* (LaRossa & LaRossa, 1981); *Worlds of Pain: Life in the Working Class Family* (Rubin, 1976); and *Brave New Families: Stories of Domestic Upheaval in Late-Twentieth Century America* (Stacey, 1998) to be useful, readable, and engaging models for effectively communicating qualitative findings.

Third, we recommend that scholars consider *joining organizations and groups* that focus on or deal with qualitative methods. Such organizations often host listservs and/or conferences that address qualitative methods. For example, in 1985 the National Council on Family Relations started the Qualitative Family Research Network, which holds a focus group meeting and sponsors workshops and educational sessions at the annual National Council on Family Relations conference. The Qualitative Family Research Network also offers many online resources to family scholars.

Scholars ideally will have exposure to qualitative methods at the graduate level (Matthews, 2012). However, it is not always the case that graduate programs in the social sciences, family studies, and related fields offer or require coursework in qualitative methods. Thus, a fourth recommendation we offer to authors who are seeking to develop or refine their competence in qualitative methods is to consider *attending workshops or trainings* in qualitative data analysis. For example, the Consortium on Qualitative Research Methods hosts an annual Institute for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research at the Maxwell School at Syracuse University. This week-long summer course provides instruction in creating and critiquing qualitative research designs as well as critical feedback on participants' own qualitative research. Likewise, the Odom Institute at University of North Carolina offers a week-long summer intensive course on qualitative methods and data analysis. Furthermore, the International Institute for Qualitative Methodology at the University of Alberta offers yearly conferences on advanced qualitative methods training, in particular in the health field. Finally, since 2010, the *Qualitative Report* has been hosting an annual conference on qualitative methods and data analysis at Nova Southeastern University. There are also

a number of consulting firms that provide consulting and workshops on qualitative data analysis.

It is important to distinguish between those workshops and courses that provide instruction on how to conduct qualitative data analysis and those that are focused on teaching a very specific qualitative data analysis software (e.g., NVivo, Atlas, etc.). Scholars who genuinely wish to learn how to conduct qualitative data analysis should ideally receive instruction, training, and/or mentorship in qualitative methods prior to learning about specific data analysis software programs. Training on such software programs should not be viewed as a substitute for training in qualitative methods and analysis or as a shortcut to learning how to perform qualitative data analysis. Indeed, scholars who are new to qualitative methods should not "pin their hope on some magical qualitative analysis software to produce novel and important insights" (Huy, 2012, pp. 284–285). Ultimately, although software may be useful for the storing and categorizing of data and may assist in the analysis process, scholars should keep in mind that "systematic analysis cannot substitute for creative synthesis" (Huy, 2012, p. 285) and "the program does not and should not do the analysis for the researcher. . . . [I]nterpretation of the analysis still reside[s] with the researcher" (Humble, 2012, p. 125).

Fifth, scholars who wish to gain experience in qualitative methods may wish to *seek out mentors or collaborators* with expertise in conducting qualitative work. They might consider what they have to offer in a potential collaboration (Roy, 2012), for example, an interesting data set, a novel research question that can best be addressed using qualitative methods, extensive knowledge of various literatures, and so on, and in turn seek out "coauthors who can bring complementary resources" to the table (Huy, 2012, p. 285). To illustrate how this process might unfold, we draw from a personal example. Over 10 years ago, the first author sought mentorship from the second author in developing more advanced skills in qualitative data analysis. The first author brought with her a large qualitative data set that explored many topics that were of interest to both authors as well as several key research questions that both authors were excited to answer together. The second author, in turn, brought more than 25 years of experience in conducting, analyzing, and teaching about qualitative methods. We worked together as a collaborative

team, each of us learning from each other. Since our early process of working together, we have collaborated on many conference symposia and paper presentations, published five qualitative articles as coauthors, and edited a book together.

IN CONCLUSION

As we stated initially, we do not wish to contribute to the proliferation of a “checklist” or “manualized” approach to conducting and writing up qualitative research (Chapple & Rogers, 1998). Instead, we are hopeful that our guideposts and suggestions will aid scholars in writing, submitting, and successfully publishing qualitative family research. We urge scholars to be aware of the conventions of publishing qualitative family research in *JMF*—but, at the same time, to keep in mind that an unconventional topic, idea, or angle is often what makes an article so compelling. By building on what has been done, but offering something new, an article can make a true contribution, thereby moving the field of qualitative family research forward.

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