
Epistemology in Qualitative Social Work Research: A Review of Published Articles, 2008–2010

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This study explores the epistemological foundations of qualitative social work research. A template-based review was completed on 100 articles from social work journals. Reviewers examined five things: (1) the purpose or aims of the research, (2) the rationale or justification for the work, (3) the populations studied, (4) the presence of four epistemological markers (addressing theory, paradigm, reflexivity, and power dynamics), and (5) the implications presented. Results underscore the exploratory nature of qualitative social work research; authors were most likely to use the word “explore” and least likely to use the term “understand” to describe their aims. The most common rationale given for the research was a gap in the literature (77%), followed by the severity or extent of the problem (50%). Authors emphasized the perspectives of respondents, who were most likely to be social work practitioners (39%) or clients (28%). Among the epistemological markers examined, authors were most likely to mention use of theory (55%) and a research paradigm (51%) and least likely to apply reflexivity (16%) or acknowledge power dynamics inherent in research (7%). Finally, authors were most likely to identify practice implications in their work (90%), followed by research (60%), theory (38%), and policy (29%).

KEY WORDS: *epistemology; qualitative methods; research methods; social work research; theory*

Social inquiry is shaped by the epistemology of the researcher, his or her underlying assumptions about the process of knowing (Denzin, 2002). Epistemology may be seen as theories of knowledge that justify the knowledge-building process that is actively or consciously adopted by the researcher (Carter & Little, 2007; Pascale, 2010). These assumptions guide our decisions about topics, research questions, theories, methods, analyses, and conclusions and help us evaluate the knowledge contributions of published work (Carter & Little, 2007; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Pascale, 2010). Koch and Harrington (1998) recognized that “researchers bring to the research product, data generated, a range of literature, a positioning of this literature, a positioning of oneself, and moral socio-political contexts” (p. 882). Examining the ways our social locations shape our process of knowing “can help us understand why certain questions get asked and answered, examine how values shape observation” (Pascale, 2010; Takacs, 2003, p. 37). Anastas (2004) noted that the researcher’s epistemology affects the kind of scholarly work done, how one values scholarship and

understands its political import, and how one situates oneself in relation to the work.

Marshall and Rossman (2006) noted the importance of “epistemological integrity,” in which authors account for the “logical and compelling connections between genre, overall strategy, the research questions, the design, and the methods” (p. 55). Researchers demonstrate their epistemological engagement with the work through explicit discussion of their research paradigm or inquiry tradition, which is fundamental for rigorous qualitative research (Anastas, 2004; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Qualitative research “should reveal a consistency and integrity of approach that is easily recognized by the reader and the reviewer” (Padgett, 2009, p. 102). Given the importance of epistemology to the research endeavor, social work researchers must make explicit the decisions made in the process of inquiry if they are serious about contributing to the knowledge base of the profession. As Padgett pointed out, “the burden of proof is on the researcher” (p. 102) to be accountable to readers regarding the underlying assumptions and logic of our work.

We focus our discussion on epistemology as research praxis that contributes to the development of knowledge in our field. Our aim in this section of the article is to discuss the practice of epistemology to support social work researchers using qualitative methods to think and write more explicitly about the epistemological foundations of our work. Practical epistemology encourages us to reflect on the connections between how we do research and the credibility of any research products; underlying this reflection must be an examination of our own knowledge formation processes (Becker, 1996; Takacs, 2003).

Interpretation is at the core of all research, and it is critical that we acknowledge the role of our “values, histories and interests” in the production of knowledge (Koch & Harrington, 1998). Guba and Lincoln (2005) suggested that researchers start by asking, “[H]ow do I know the world?” (p. 183). Do I know through my engagement with the world? How do I account for myself (history, social positions) in the process of social inquiry? What questions, assumptions, and beliefs do I bring to this process? Researchers can also reflect on how the research question has been “defined and limited” by what can be learned and how the topic might be examined differently (Dowling, 2006, p. 11). Pascale (2010) suggested researchers reflect on why the phenomenon is important to study and examine the ways the study might proceed. She noted that “it might seem that standards of good research would require scholars to be accountable for the many processes of interpretation involved in knowledge production” (p. 72).

These questions lead us to the practice of reflexivity, focusing on the relationship between researchers and their work and with participants, which is central to epistemology. Reflexivity requires researchers to develop an ongoing and critical awareness of the social inputs shaping the production of knowledge in their work (Koch & Harrington, 1998). All research findings are shaped by the histories that both the researcher and the participants bring to the project. Critical awareness helps researchers shine a light on the diversity and complexity of social locations and relationships we bring to knowledge production and the ways in which our own biographies shape the process and outcomes of research and the interactions with participants. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) suggested a number of thoughtful questions aimed at helping

researchers make explicit the connections between our social locations and our knowledge-building activities. It is important that researchers practice reflexivity as an ongoing process of self-observation throughout the research project rather than as a set of answers to cut and paste into reports and articles.

Reflexivity can strengthen the validity or knowledge claims in all research:

Through recognizing and analyzing the cultures in which we are positioned, and that therefore cannot help but mold our world-views, we take steps to become more aware and even more objective. We come to know the world more fully by knowing how we know the world” (Takacs, 2003, p. 29). This is not a philosophical exercise in epistemology but a practice in which the researcher attempts to “identify, acknowledge and do something about the limitations of the research. (Dowling, 2006, p. 12)

Watt (2007) described her process of reflexivity by sharing journal reflections from her first experience using qualitative methods in a pilot study carried out for a graduate level research course. She acknowledged that to be accountable to participants and readers about the decisions that comprise the process of knowledge construction audiences should have the opportunity to see how the researcher goes about the process of knowledge construction during a particular study. By engaging in ongoing dialogue with themselves through journal writing, researchers may be able to better determine what they know and how they think they came to know it. An introspective record of a researcher’s work potentially helps them to take stock of biases, feelings, and thoughts, so they can understand how these may be influencing the research. Making such information available to readers provides them with a means to better evaluate the findings. Proponents of the openness in qualitative inquiry assert a need to publicly disclose research decisions.

Watt (2007) acknowledged her initial uncertainty about how reflexivity would strengthen her work and wrote that “I now see that it has helped me to clarify my thinking, values, purposes, and beliefs. I can now be up front about this so others

know where I'm coming from. I cannot shake off my biases, but I can make them known" (p. 94).

Personal reflexivity becomes a practice in which the researcher "articulates personal and political dimensions of the research enterprise so both researcher and audience can recognize it" (Anastas, 2004, p. 60). Such transparency enables readers and participants to evaluate the work on its merits-in-context and acknowledges their participation in the construction of knowledge.

The relationship between the researcher and the participants in the project is a central aspect of reflexivity, one in which the researcher reflects on her or his personal history and social locations and the ways these shape interactions with participants and may contribute to power dynamics in the relationship. It is critical for researchers to see the multiple positions they occupy during the process of research, many of which grant power and privilege to the researcher relative to the participants: investigator, expert, decision maker, participant recruiter, and insider/outsider, among others. In time, being aware of the ways these roles play out in the process of the work and the ways they shape our interactions with participants and examining the possibilities of sharing roles and privilege become a reflexive activity for the researcher. Through development of our awareness of the dynamic relationships between researchers and participants, we increase the visibility of "alternate claims to power" and are able to "advocate for the marginalized" by pointing out the "structures that make the dominant positionality [that of the academy or of the research enterprise] seem inevitable" (Takacs, 2003, p. 35). Commenting on this aspect of research, Denzin (2002) noted that "social work research becomes a civic, participatory, collaborative project that joins the researcher with the researched in an ongoing moral dialogue" (p. 31–32).

Theory is another aspect of epistemology. As Padgett (2009) stated, "theory matters." Researchers acknowledge that there is no research without theory, but they frequently neglect to discuss it (Barusch, Gringeri, & George, 2011; Gringeri, Wahab, & Anderson-Nathe, 2010). Theoretical approaches highlight conceptual maps that guide our views of the literature, our selection of research questions and our omission of alternative questions, our choice of methods, and our analysis and interpretation of data (Anastas, 2004, p. 4). Theory helps structure our thinking on a given topic, supports researchers in extending our interpretations

from description to explanation, and provides the scaffolding and focus for data analysis. "Concepts and theories are essential in knowing ... and explanation is useful even when one cannot demonstrate causation or prediction" (Anastas, 2004, p. 3). Explicit discussion of the theories that frame our works shows participants, colleagues, and readers "how we know the world" and allows them to interact with us and evaluate our work. "The value of research depends upon the ability of researcher to substantiate a number of claims about ... the validity of their interpretation of the evidence in the light of theory" (Avis, 2005, p. 12).

Each researcher has a paradigm that guides the work, a view of the process of knowledge production composed of the basic elements of ontology (nature of existence), epistemology (nature of knowing), methodology (best ways to build knowledge), and axiology (the role of values in knowledge development) (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Specific paradigms used in social science research include post-positivism, constructivism, critical theory, and participatory action frameworks; each paradigm responds differently to the questions raised by the basic elements. Clear discussion of the research paradigm informing the work helps readers understand the philosophical foundations and assumptions that frame the research. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) noted that

paradigms or worldviews are neither right nor wrong; one way of seeing is another way of not seeing. However, paradigms are powerful ways of looking at that reality, and they are windows giving us information about the social world and often frame the particular questions we seek to answer. (p. 38)

Thus, we see the following aspects as critical to the epistemological underpinnings of research: reflexivity, articulation of the relationship between researchers and participants, explicit framing of the work in theory, and a conscious and integrated use of a tradition of inquiry or research paradigm.

We conducted this research to inform the conversation about authors' epistemological engagement in social work qualitative research. We aimed to develop in this work a portrait of the epistemological approaches used in development of the knowledge base for social work. To address this

purpose we used an embedded mixed-methods design that began with qualitative data, which were merged into categories and then subjected to quantitative analysis (Creswell & Clark, 2011). We would thus locate this work within the pragmatic paradigm that characterizes most mixed-methods research (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

METHOD

The study used a retrospective descriptive approach based on review of a random sample of 100 articles published between 2008 and 2010 in social work journals that are listed in the *Journal Citation Reports: 2005 Social Sciences Edition*. Data were recorded on a standardized template and analyzed using descriptive and bivariate procedures available in SPSS. In this section we discuss the researchers, the data collection template and review process, issues concerning reliability, the sample, and the data analysis procedures.

Researchers

Three researchers participated in this study. Two are senior faculty members in colleges of social work. Both were trained in the United States, and both have taught qualitative methods at the doctoral level; one continues to do so. Of these two, one was trained in quantitative methods, coming to qualitative work mid-career, whereas the other was trained in and conducted her work exclusively using qualitative methods. Both senior authors were appointed to faculty positions over 20 years earlier, when qualitative methods were given short shrift in doctoral curriculum; both participated in developing a curriculum on qualitative methods and facilitated, in time, the development of a full semester required course on qualitative methods in the doctoral curriculum. This and previous work on rigor in qualitative research have greatly sharpened their awareness of their own research processes and have deepened their attention to the content and process of their teaching in this area. The third researcher is currently pursuing a master of public policy and has an MSW degree from a U.S. university. He has had a basic introduction to research design and specialized training in statistics.

Template

On the basis of our review of literature and our personal experience, we drafted a template for the review of each article. We then used this draft to

review a pilot sample of five manuscripts, and the template was revised on the basis of the results. In addition to descriptive information about each article (title, journal, year published, aims, and sample size), the template had space to note the presence or absence of the following: purposes or aims of the work, its rationale or justification, the sample studied, the presence of four key epistemological markers, and the implications identified. Space was also provided for reviewers to enter specific text from the article that demonstrated the presence of each item under consideration.

Our operational definition of reflexivity included any explicit discussion of the author's connections to the research topic, such as personal or professional experiences that led the author to be interested in the subject. We examined each article for theoretical or conceptual frameworks that were used in the literature review, the methodology, or the analysis and discussion. We acknowledged the presence of theory even when a set of interrelated constructs not specified as theory informed the work. We also acknowledged any discussion of the relationship between the researcher and the participants, even if rather brief; specifically, we looked for the author's recognition of the potential power and privilege inherent in the researcher-participant relationship. We reviewed each work for the presence of a specified research paradigm or tradition of inquiry, such as phenomenology, constructivism, grounded theory, or critical theory, keeping in mind Marshall and Rossman's (2006) suggestion that authors of qualitative research articulate the "logical and compelling connections" in their work, starting with the paradigm. We used these categories to review published social work literature from 2008 to 2010, to explore qualitative social work researchers' engagement with and accountability to these epistemological issues in their work.

Reliability

The initial review of pilot articles was followed by another review of five different articles, which gave us the opportunity to clarify the meaning of key terms. "Theory" was clarified to include the mention of theory, whether or not it was used extensively throughout the article. Likewise "paradigm" was operationalized to include the mention of a methodological approach such as grounded theory or social constructivism. "Reflexivity" was defined to include any mention of researcher

characteristics that would assist the reviewer in determining the likelihood of bias. Finally, any mention of the power dynamics inherent in the relationship between researcher and subject was seen as addressing the “power” marker. These definitions enhanced the reliability of our reviews because it freed us from judgment calls about whether the use of these constructs was adequate. Consequently, in our third and final pilot review of five additional articles, inter-rater agreement ranged from 86% to 88%. All 15 pilot reviews are included in the sample of 100 articles reviewed.

To check for consistent reviewer differences, we also computed a chi-square statistic for a cross-tab of each of the markers by reviewer. No significant reviewer effects were observed for the four epistemology markers under consideration.

Sample

A random sample of 100 articles was drawn from 27 journals listed under social work in the *Journal Citation Reports: 2005 Social Science Edition (JCR)*. To be eligible for inclusion in the study, an article must have reported on the collection and analysis of exclusively qualitative data. Selection of the initial pool of articles included those published between 2008 and 2010 that had the word “qualitative” in either the abstract or the key words. This yielded a total of 146 articles. This pool of articles was then numbered, and a random number generator was used to select 100. A complete list of the articles reviewed is available from the corresponding author on request.

As it turned out, 3% of the initial sample could not be used, either because the research did not involve the collection and analysis of data or because the authors used mixed methods. These were replaced using another random sampling of the remaining pool with articles that met both sampling criteria. The resulting sample was distributed across all three years, with a concentration in 2009. The sample drew from all but three of the 27 journals listed in the *JCR*. The percentage from each journal is summarized in Table 1.

Analysis

We collected textual data on each article to supplement the descriptive statistics regarding the epistemological aspects of each work. We recorded written statements of the aims or purposes of the research, the rationale for the work, articulation of

Table 1: Percentage of Sampled Articles, by Year and Journal (N = 100)

Year	%
2008	5
2009	70
2010	25
Journal	Frequency
<i>Administration in Social Work</i>	4
<i>Affilia</i>	6
<i>American Journal of Community Psychology</i>	4
<i>British Journal of Social Work</i>	22
<i>Child & Family Social Work</i>	6
<i>Child Abuse & Neglect</i>	3
<i>Child Welfare</i>	3
<i>Children & Youth Services Review</i>	5
<i>Clinical Social Work Journal</i>	1
<i>Family Relations</i>	5
<i>Health & Social Care in the Community</i>	18
<i>Health & Social Work</i>	5
<i>International Journal of Social Work</i>	4
<i>International Social Work</i>	1
<i>Journal of Social Policy</i>	4
<i>Journal of Social Service Research</i>	1
<i>Journal of Social Work Education</i>	1
<i>Research on Social Work Practice</i>	1
<i>Social Service Review</i>	1
<i>Social Work in Health Care</i>	5
Total	100

theory or conceptual frameworks, and the verbs authors used to describe their aims. We also gathered excerpts of statements of implications for research, practice, policy, and theory. On the basis of thematic analysis of these excerpts, response categories were generated for use in subsequent statistical analyses.

Initially we set out to describe the epistemological foundations of qualitative social work research. For this purpose, simple descriptive measures were computed to determine the percentage of articles that included the characteristics under consideration. During the course of data collection and analysis, several questions arose that required the use of bivariate statistics. We wondered, for instance, whether specific research aims were associated with the application of epistemological markers. Chi-square statistics were computed to address these bivariate questions.

Once statistical analysis of the data was complete, we undertook a process of peer review. Seven colleagues agreed to participate in the review of our preliminary findings and met with us one afternoon to discuss and interpret the studies. On the basis of

Table 2: Aims or Purpose of the Research

Verb Used to Describe Purpose	%
Explore	49
Examine	28
Report	19
Describe	14
Understand	14

their feedback, we undertook additional analysis and modified our interpretation of the findings.

RESULTS

Table 2 presents the verbs authors used to describe their aims. The terms “explore,” “report,” and “describe” tended to denote more descriptive work leading to general implications rather than development of the analysis with links to theoretical explanations. “Examine” and “understand” suggested work that moved from description toward a more developed analysis.

In descriptions of the purposes of research, authors most often used “experience” or “perception”; 70% of the articles used one of these terms to lay out the aim of their work. Typically, the authors’ main goal was to focus on participants’ experiences or perceptions in order to understand particular social phenomena.

Most authors justified their research based on a gap in the literature. Findings on justification are summarized in Table 3.

About half (49%) of the articles mentioned using a research paradigm; 20 authors used grounded theory to some extent, eight used Participatory Action Research, and six specified phenomenology. Most authors who mentioned grounded theory used it as a data analysis strategy rather than as a comprehensive paradigm designed to generate experience-based models or theory. Fifty-one percent did not specify a research paradigm.

Details of the populations that were studied are presented in Table 4. One-third of the articles used a variety of categories of participants.

The implications identified by the authors for their work are presented in Table 5. A summary index was computed to gauge the number of areas in which authors listed implications. Results indicated that 21% identified one of the four types of implications, 44% identified two, 28% identified three, and only 7% identified all four. Authors most commonly mentioned practice and research implications together.

Table 3: Rational or Justification for the Work

Rationale	%
Gap in literature	77
The problem (nature, severity, extent)	50
Practice or practical implications	33
Neglected voices	21
Other rationale:	
Importance	8
New approach	8
Interest	6
Theory	6
Curricular deficiency	4

Notes: $N=100$. However, authors of articles could use more than one verb to describe the purpose or articulate more than one rationale, and thus totals may be greater than 100.

Table 4: Populations Studied

Population	%
Practitioners	39
Clients	28
Parents and families	8
Survivors and victims	6
Students	5
Caregivers	5
Marginalized groups (not otherwise included: immigrants, aged, street youths)	5
Elites (advocates, policymakers, stakeholders, researchers)	5
Other	8

We constructed an index of epistemological markers evident in each article based on whether authors applied theory, mentioned a research paradigm, engaged in reflexivity, or discussed power in the research relationship. The percentage of articles having one, two, three, or all four of the markers are presented in Table 6: 61% contained one or two markers, whereas 12% contained three or all four epistemological markers, and 27% contained none of the markers.

We also estimated chi squares to describe the relationships among the epistemological indicators. We found that authors who described the theoretical foundations of their work were more likely than those who did not to use reflexivity. Among those who described their theoretical framework, 24% addressed reflexivity. Among those who did not, only 7% mentioned reflexivity ($p < .03$).

The application of theory was also associated with the use of “examine” as a verb to describe the aims of the research. Among authors who identified a theoretical framework, 36% had set out to

Table 5: Implications Identified

Type of Implication	%
Practice	90
Research	60
Theory	38
Policy	29

Notes: $N = 100$. However, studies may have participants from more than one group and articulate one or more types of implications, and thus totals may be greater than 100.

Table 6: Epistemological Markers

Marker	%
Theory	55
Paradigm	51
Reflexivity	16
Power	7
Number of Markers	
1	32
2	29
3	9
4	3

Notes: $N = 100$. However, authors of articles could employ more than one marker, and thus totals may be greater than 100.

“examine” a social issue or problem. Of those who did not describe their theoretical framework, only 18% used the term “examine” to describe their aims ($p < .05$).

It is not surprising that the theoretical framework and theoretical implications were positively associated: 52% of articles that articulated a theoretical framework identified theoretical implications, whereas 20% of those that did not describe the theoretical basis of their work identified theoretical implications ($p < .01$).

DISCUSSION

This study examined the presence of epistemological indicators in qualitative social work articles published from 2008 to 2010. We argue that the development and discussion of epistemological dimensions strengthen the potential knowledge contributions of qualitative research. In particular, one may think of theory and reflexivity as twin pillars of rigorous qualitative research; certainly both are strongly encouraged by qualitative research texts (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Olesen, 2005; Pascale, 2010). The importance granted to these indicators is justified because theoretical frameworks support researchers in moving their work toward the explanatory or analytic level, and reflexivity helps researchers develop

critical awareness of their relationship to their work. Thus, theory and reflexivity are important aspects of epistemology that support the process of knowledge building.

Given the importance of these strategies, it was affirming to find positive associations between theory and reflexivity. Those who incorporated theory in their work were more likely to locate themselves in their research. However, the low rate of reflexivity in social work articles requires our attention. It is somewhat puzzling that social workers would be reluctant to situate themselves in their research. As Kanuha (2000) noted with regard to low rates of reflexivity overall, “[S]ocial science and certainly social work literature are not proliferated by first person accounts from either nonnative or native researchers about the experience of conducting research” (p. 441). It is not clear whether social work researchers’ lack of reflexivity in published articles is due to discomfort with disclosure or with a desire to maintain the post-positivist perspective that our positionality does not, or should not, matter (Kanuha, 2000). The low rate of reflexivity in published articles may obscure its presence in the process of research that is not reported in publications; this, together with lack of expectation on the part of peer reviewers and journal editors, may contribute to its relative absence in published articles. We encourage graduate-level training in qualitative research and journal editors and reviewers’ giving substantial emphasis to theory and reflexivity so that in greater numbers of social work publications researchers will “incorporate a reflexive account into their research product by signposting to readers ‘what is going on’ while researching” (Koch & Harrington, 1998, p. 887).

Discussion of power dynamics in the researcher-participant relationship received short shrift; it was addressed in only 7% of the articles. This finding is not puzzling, given that only 16% of the sample shared reflexive accounts. As researchers become more accustomed to disclosing reflexive accounts and editors and reviewers more often require it, we believe more publications will include reflections on the power dynamics in the process of the research project.

Research paradigms are equally important. Although researchers using qualitative methods tend to be eclectic in combining paradigms or parts of various paradigms, we need to be accountable to participants and readers regarding our approach to

knowledge building. We are encouraged that about half (49%) of the sample did specify a paradigm, and we strongly encourage all researchers and editors to consider this a requirement of rigorous qualitative research. Journal editors, in particular, should consider sending manuscripts using qualitative methods to reviewers who are well acquainted with dimensions of rigor and epistemology in qualitative research.

The verbs used by authors most often to articulate the purposes of the research were “experience” or “perception,” suggesting that ways of knowing in social work qualitative research are experientially based and grounded in the social world of participants. This also suggests that social work researchers place a high value on starting with individual experience and the ways in which people make meaning from those experiences, both of which are consonant with professional values.

Authors most frequently developed implications for social work practice and least frequently developed implications for policy change. We suggest that authors’ implications point to where we as social workers tend to place our hope for change; from these results, most social work researchers are aiming to affect practice, whereas less than one-third are aiming for macro-level change. It may be that researchers less frequently think of qualitative research methods as consonant with policy research or that researchers focused on individual-level experiences are not drawing out the macro-level implications from those experiences.

It seems that, as researchers, we have started to acknowledge the importance of epistemology in our work; that three-fifths of the articles we reviewed had one or two markers indicates a beginning recognition that it is important. That more than one-quarter of the sample articles contained no epistemological markers is, however, a strong indicator of the improvement needed in qualitative social work research. These findings suggest that we are not paying as much attention to underlying issues of epistemology as we could, and thus, when we use qualitative methods, we are not positioning our work to make a stronger contribution to the knowledge base in social work.

Social work education plays an important role in training future researchers to deliberately incorporate epistemological considerations throughout the research process. Research courses in social work should directly address the epistemological foundations of research. For example, research instructors

can provide opportunities for students to discuss the epistemological underpinnings of published articles. Faculty who mentor graduate students in the early developmental phases of independent research can challenge them to make their epistemological foundations explicit. Mentors can also encourage doctoral students to discuss epistemological foundations of their research in manuscripts submitted to journals.

Editors and peer reviewers in social work journals play a critical role in improvement of the clarity and articulation of the epistemological foundations of social work research. At present, we are aware of few review forms used in journals that direct reviewers’ attention to theory and even fewer that go beyond this to incorporate other epistemological concerns. Consequently, this foundational aspect of the research process may fall by the wayside in the review of manuscripts. We suggest that editors consider adding epistemological markers to review forms and that reviewers call on authors to incorporate epistemological foundations—at a minimum, theory, power, reflexivity, and paradigm—in manuscripts submitted for publication.

Epistemological integrity means that researchers hold themselves to high standards of accountability in their published work with regard to open and clear discussion of their research paradigm, application of theory, reflexivity, and understanding of power in their relationship with participants. Building our work on a solid epistemological foundation requires anchoring the work in theory, consciously interweaving reflexive accounts throughout the process, and deliberately linking each aspect of the work within the paradigm. This is indeed a high standard, and although very few authors of the sample articles included discussion of all four epistemological aspects, we encourage editors and reviewers to evaluate manuscripts along these dimensions of research. As Anastas (2004) noted, “[T]here is no right and wrong in epistemology, only in not being willing to know about knowing” (p. 9). **SWR**

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RESEARCH NOTES

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