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On ethics regimes and the problem of maintaining the face of qualitative research: a commentary on Iara C. Z. Guerriero's and Sueli Dallari's paper

Sobre diretrizes éticas e a questão de manter as características da pesquisa qualitativa: um comentário sobre o artigo de Guerriero & Dallari

*Will C. van den Hoonaard*¹

Guerriero and Dallari's paper, "The Need for Adequate Ethical Guidelines for Qualitative Health Research," illustrates vital differences between the principles and paradigms of medical research and those of the social sciences, and qualitative research in particular. They are quite right when they claim, that "it is not adequate to analyze qualitative researches in health by seeking the support" of such documents that are the fundamental bases of medical and positivist research. This paper explores the ongoing problems imposed by the medical-research ethics model on qualitative research. This paper also asserts that the many varieties of qualitative research, the rise of interdisciplinarity, the ignorance of the historical roots of qualitative research, and the (re)emergence of neo-positivism make it difficult for qualitative research to resist the impact of national ethics regimes.

Differences between qualitative and medical research related to ethics

As they make clear, there are stark contrasts between medical and qualitative research. Qualitative research does not involve hypothesis testing and, in contrast to medical research, affirms the fact that knowledge is socially produced: it is not possible to isolate knowledge from the persons who produce it, whether researcher and/or research participants. Guerriero and Dallari also note that it is quite impossible to pre-establish with any precision or accuracy the path of a qualitative research project. The techniques of research, the concepts and themes, the sampling (if any), and other related research and ethical issues emerge from the research itself. It is a highly interpretive science in which the term "protocol" (which means a measurement without interpretation) itself cannot be used.

Qualitative health research pays much attention to the meanings that people attach to what they do and say. An older research participant

might consider him- or herself in relatively good health in comparison to their age peers, but in poor health in comparison to younger people. A child with a chronic illness might perceive inoculation or medical intervention with less trepidation than a healthy child who sees such interventions in more drastic terms, thereby altering the perceptions of risk and harm. Paternalistic attitudes by professionals produce a different form of social interaction than those that acknowledge the lived experiences of the older patient being researched or treated.

Unhappily, the guidelines of ethics regimes, whether in Brazil (such as through Resolution 196/96 of the Conselho Nacional de Saúde of Brazil) or in other countries leave no room for these particular features of qualitative research. They offer, in fact, too little to qualitative researchers. This assertion stands at the heart of Guerriero and Dallari's paper. Qualitative researchers in other parts of the world have made similar assertions—all of which have led to substantive complaints. The marginal status of qualitative research, however, has allowed the purveyors of ethics to easily dismiss these complaints. Too numerous are the published complaints to list them all in this short essay.

The many varieties of qualitative research

Guerriero and Dallari's observations conform to the widely-held views of numerous social scientists, and qualitative researchers in particular, about the need to reform research ethics regimes. For example, in Canada, *Giving Voice to the Spectrum* by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Working Committee in 2004 encapsulated some "fifty-seven submissions, comprising hundreds of pages of commentary and suggestions" from individuals, research ethics boards, disciplinary associations, trans-disciplinary organizations, and institutes representing at least 17 disciplines¹. A more recent exercise (2007), in response to its Consultation Document, evoked more than 75 responses². These responses were clear in their advocacy to change Canada's Tri-Council Policy Statement on Research Involving Humans (TCPS) to reflect more faithfully the concerns of qualitative researchers.

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It is not only the weak status of qualitative research that saps the force of these complaints, but also the fact that qualitative research adumbrates many methods and strategies of research. It is not possible for qualitative researchers to express one coherent model to resist the impact of the medical-ethics regime. There are many shades of qualitative research. Between 1920s and 1960s, field research was the dominant approach in qualitative research, but no researchers saw their research as "qualitative." In the late 1960s, Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser sought to legitimate Grounded Theory and relied on terms borrowed from quantitative research ("theoretical sampling," "(axial) coding," and "constant comparative method" are some of the terms derived from a quantitative/statistical model of research). Currently, as disciplines outside of sociology and anthropology take up qualitative research, qualitative research has become more cosmopolitan. As Dr. Guerriero mentions, qualitative research can cover many research strategies. This multiplicity of methods might be related to the style of presenting one's research proposal to research ethics boards to avoid having to go back to the REB if one method does not quite pan out.

Cosmopolitanism entails diversity and other disciplines beyond the confines of sociology and anthropology now define qualitative research in many different ways. For example, Guerriero and Dallari have found themselves relying on the model promulgated by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln – a model that stretches the boundaries of qualitative research over areas not seen in the early days of qualitative research. Still, it is a model that some other qualitative researchers might be reluctant to subscribe themselves to wholeheartedly. For example, the Denzin and Lincoln text do not refer to "sensitizing concepts," an important term coined by Herbert G. Blumer (who also coined "symbolic interactionism")³. Nor does their handbook refer to "generic social processes," a relevant conceptual tool developed by the Canadian Robert Prus⁴.

There are, moreover, other dimensions that are reshaping qualitative research that make it more difficult to resist the imposition of research-ethics regimes. These dimensions pertain to the interdisciplinary nature of current qualitative research approaches.

The force of interdisciplinarity

Research-granting agencies, universities, and

other funding bodies vaunt "interdisciplinarity" to stimulate solutions to the problems of society. Any fair-minded researcher would aver such an approach is an essential feature of the contemporary research landscape. Interdisciplinarity speaks to the spirit of the times fraught with complex social, cultural, and economic problems. Moreover, students find interdisciplinary programs more attractive than single-discipline programs. There is thus a vast increase of such programs.

However, interdisciplinarity poses a challenge to the core meaning of what it means to be a qualitative researcher and undermines the unique claims of qualitative researchers as a model of research as distinct from the paradigms of quantitative or medical research. Any claims that some or many qualitative researchers might make about that uniqueness are softened by the absence of the core meaning of qualitative research due to growing interdisciplinarity. As a result, too, constructs of medical research are now finding a way into qualitative research itself. The "new" qualitative researchers resort to terms and concepts traditionally unfamiliar to traditional qualitative research. "Protocols," "signed informed consent forms," and the use of advance-coding techniques of analysis employing many research assistants seem to vitiate the traditional basis of qualitative research—all in the name of the benefits of interdisciplinarity.

So, too, are other dimensions changing the face of qualitative research. The availability of larger sums of research grants to interdisciplinary research gives a larger profile, and perhaps credulity to this type of research (traditional qualitative research, traditionally involved inductive approaches, smaller research personnel, often involving only one researcher in a single research setting, and with smaller budgets). This increased funding, with the help of the interdisciplinary focus of the research, is thus pushing qualitative research beyond its usual confines of smallness.

As a consequence, the pleas by researchers invested in conventional qualitative research, claiming that their paradigms are different from the ones advocated by bio-medical ethics regimes, are increasingly reduced to voices of a minority within a minority, perhaps relegated to the belief that conventional qualitative research is an anachronistic paradigm.

The voices of qualitative researchers are further reduced by the ever-increasing spiral of ignorance about the source, origins, and history of qualitative research.

The force of cutting off the roots

Granted, qualitative research has experienced a remarkable emergence and growth during the past two decades or more. No longer confined within anthropology or certain segments of sociology, qualitative research has expanded into numerous other disciplines. This abundance of interest has resulted in the loss of the traditional, classical, core principles of qualitative research. However, the prevalence of so many disciplines and fields practicing qualitative research is not accompanied by a deeper reliance and probing of the roots of qualitative research⁵. As Laurel Richardson avers, a tall building requires a deep foundation, and a tall tree requires deep roots. "The implications for the qualitative researcher," according to Richardson, "are to dig deep into their own biographies and cultural heritages, and to dig deep into the intellectual and practical knowledge within the disciplines."

There is a final trend that is reducing the unique claims of qualitative research, namely the recrudescence of positivism, or neo-positivism. It now affects the qualitative-research enterprise itself, reducing its unique claims.

The force of neo-positivism

The re-emergence of positivism (i.e. "neo-positivism") is proving to be quite a challenge to qualitative research, eroding the distinctive nature of qualitative research and its particular ethical dimensions.

Neo-positivism on a large scale has, according to Andre Kiss, been accepted internationally and declared as the "approved basis of the global system of actual institutions⁶." Neo-positivism has permeated qualitative research. For example, Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln enthusiastically speak about "triangulation," a concept derived from geodesy⁷. Although Denzin and Lincoln suggest that this term should not be taken literally, this concept implies that empirical "truth" can eventually be uncovered or discovered through methodological, empirical, or theoretical triangulation. The desire for objectivity is paramount.

I have already noted the widescale acceptance of qualitative methodology by researchers in other disciplines. In the case of university faculties of nursing, the qualitative research paradigm has acquired a quantitative or medical orientation. The extensive use of the quantitative orientation of segments of Grounded Theory, the adoption

of computerized coding, the employment of a large number of research assistants in the prosecution of the methodology, the selection of over one-hundred interview participants, and the creation of lengthy signed consent forms that parallel forms used in medical research – all these characterize a new form of qualitative research. It is highly unlikely that the purveyors of this kind of "qualitative" research will claim qualitative research as a distinct paradigm. This new form reinforces the neo-positivistic model of research that is rapidly becoming the standard feature of large research-grant projects.

Conclusion

It is important to maintain the face of qualitative research despite the pressures of national ethics regimes which advocate the medical model of research. Maintaining such a face is indeed a difficult task.

Medical research is vast, strong, and large. Qualitative research is small-scale, uses inductive reasoning, and relies on the empirical, everyday world filled with meaning. Two contrastive models of research. The shrinking of conventional qualitative research into smaller niches of social research is a worrisome trend that is further exacerbated by the existence of many varieties of qualitative research (which makes it more difficult to assert just one defining aspect of qualitative research), the interdisciplinary adoption of qualitative research (which opens qualitative research to divergent understandings), the increasing cutting off of knowledge of the historical roots of qualitative research, and, finally, the emergence of neo-positivism—all these are leading to the erosion of conventional qualitative research and blurring the distinctive aspects of qualitative research.

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A difficult dialogue

Um diálogo difícil

Cynthia Andersen Sarti²

Firstly, I would like to compliment the authors and this journal on the initiative to promote the public debate on the inadequacy of the norms that govern the Committees for Ethics in Research (known in Portuguese as CEPs) in Brazil, regarding qualitative research developed in the Human and Social Sciences.

The current norms have been causing serious constraints to fieldwork and analyses that employ qualitative methodologies. The debate is particularly relevant and urgent, since there is a consensus about the need to create norms for research procedures, in their ethical aspects, in all the areas of knowledge. This is due to the fact that sometimes the results of scientific research do not favor the researched groups or people; they may even harm them. We know that scientific/technological progress and human progress do not necessarily walk together. The problem is that we need to establish norms respecting the specificities of the different areas of knowledge.

Guerriero and Dallari go straight to the point when they analyze the inadequacy of Resolution CNS 196/96 of the Ministry of Health, which creates rules for "researches involving human beings". The authors argue that the inadequacy of the rules in relation to qualitative research con-

cerns the incompatibility between such rules and the interpretative paradigm of the human and social sciences. They strengthen the point of view of the researchers in these areas, expressed in diverse critical analyses about the action of the CEPs¹⁻⁵. They highlight aspects that are relevant to the discussion about ethics in qualitative research: the researcher's subjectivity as a tool in his/her work; the specificity of the techniques; the interpretative character of knowledge; the character of contextualized activity, which makes it difficult to think about scientific production as strictly "individual"; the text that reveals different voices and points of view; the relationship between researcher and research subject as a problem.

The authors show that in the interpretative paradigms, based on which qualitative research is developed, "ethics is intrinsic to the research methodology". It originates from the research itself; it is "not an aspect that is outside it, to be evaluated separately". The discussion on ethical aspects continually accompanies qualitative research in all its phases: data collection, analysis and results presentation. Thus, Guerriero and Dallari conclude that "it is essential to consider the paradigms that guide each research study, so that it is possible to analyze their ethical aspects". One can understand from this that each paradigm has its own evaluation rules. And here lies the difficulty faced by the CEPs.

The authors refer to the documents that influenced Resolution CNS 196/96, the Belmont Report and the CIOMS 1993 guidelines, which assume the existence of only one research paradigm, based on its application to the biomedical and behavioral areas. They show that the Brazilian norm extends their limits and encompasses all the researches that "involve human beings", from whatever knowledge area. This posture suggests, according to Oliveira⁶, "a certain extrapolation of domains" that he calls "biocentrism", as it "arbitrarily imposes a local, biomedical view on research practice, or on ethics in research practice, as if it were universal". As the authors show, from that, several kinds of problems arise.

Considering the area of Health, it is important to highlight that the interdisciplinary perspective is fundamental, since all the scientific fields

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involved in that area depend on the contribution of the others. The object of the Health area transcends the field of each discipline. When one knowledge field is assimilated into another one, however, they lose the alterity that constitutes them as specific areas and we are before the hegemony of one over the other, which obstructs dialogue. There is always some degree of tension in this dialogue, as an equitable position of the postulates of the distinct fields of knowledge is searched. Nevertheless, there are ways in which this dialogue is possible. One can resort to the mode of functioning of the human sciences, according to which, the paradigms neither overcome nor succeed one another. They coexist, preventing us from looking for an imaginary victory of one over the other⁷, which would hinder the coexistence of distinct references.

The authors argue that the paradigms of each one of these scientific fields are radically different. There is no possible identification. In the Health area, the difference of paradigms is constitutive. There are distinct views and equally different ways to approach the object. Therefore, their articulation can only happen based on the recognition of the differences. Thus, the first movement towards dialogue is separation, so that the next step may lead to an encounter³.

As the interdisciplinary practice is a social practice that involves, as such, power relations, it brings with it the risk that the features of one of the disciplines are dissolved, due to the hegemony of the other one. When this happens, alterity is extinguished, together with the possibility of the necessary exchange in a dialogic field. The development of the fields must be allowed, based on their own epistemology and on their own scientific criteria, which are recognized as different. Dialogue is obstructed when one field is assimilated into the other, as occurs in the guidelines that govern the CEPs.

Taking into account this diversity of paradigms becomes a necessity in the scope of the ethics committees, as argued by Guerriero and Dallari, so that their norms and codes can be applied to different kinds of research. This, in itself, is an ethical posture, because it is established based on the recognition of distinct fields of knowledge. The ethical discussion supposes the existence of confrontation and negotiation between distinct points of view, because the differences are "immeasurable" (or would it be better to say, insurmountable?).

The authors summarize the aspects around which the ethical discussion gravitates, when one

reflects on the mismatches between the CEPs norms and qualitative research. It is worth to stand out the relationship between the researcher and the research subject and the polemic regarding the informed consent (in Portuguese, Termo de Consentimento Livre e Esclarecido - TCLE).

The issue of the ethical regulation of research by the CEPs has been criticized particularly in the scope of anthropology. This issue was summarized in the book edited by the Brazilian Anthropology Association⁴. As anthropology, in its origin, studies cultures that are different from that of the researcher, it views the discussion about the relationship between the anthropologist and his/her "object" of study as a problem that is not only ethical and methodological, but also epistemological. Anthropological knowledge was built precisely within this set of problems. If the relationship is not established in adequate terms for both sides, the research cannot be carried out. Thus, every scientific discipline, to validate itself, is constituted from the dialogue between the scholar and his/her peers; however, texts that are valid in the area of anthropology must be supported, in addition, by the conditions of the dialogue between the researcher and the research subject⁸.

I start from the assumption that the ethical discussion in research must take into account the conditions in which this discussion occurs, so that it happens based on the principle of equity. As social scientists, we know that the same phrase is heard differently, depending on who speaks. The more a person is socially invested with authority, the more he/she will be heard. The legitimacy of the discourse of a recognized scientific authority is guaranteed by the place the scientist occupies in society. Therefore, the terms of the relationship among those who speak will give meaning to what is said. This means, finally, that the ethical discussion involves a political discussion, which is to say that it is permeated with the power relationships in society. The place of the scientist/researcher, and also the place of the research subject, is inscribed in a social and symbolic order that defines in advance the place of each one of them. This order – which the scientist can either reproduce or question – defines who is the object and who can be the subject of knowledge.

The TCLE is based on the assumption that the research "subject" has the autonomy to choose. We should ask about the conditions of possibility of the existence of this autonomous subject, who freely consents. Countless questions emerge: what are the terms of the communication between the researcher and the research sub-

ject? What place each of them speaks from? How does one see and face the other?

The consent of the research “subject”, particularly in the area of Health, leans on the authority of the professional/researcher, whose discourse is assimilated as a knowledge that is socially legitimated and recognized. This is the way in which this discourse will be internalized by individuals, mainly by the “patients” placed in a situation of vulnerability. Given the identification between knowledge and power, the implicit risk in this assimilation leads to the notion of symbolic violence⁹. The possibility of exercising this form of symbolic violence emerges when there is no discussion about the bases on which the consent of the research subjects is founded. It is necessary to ask why the research subjects consent¹, what their reasons are, mainly when they are “patients”. Moreover, we should ask whether the research subjects can refuse to consent, exercising disobedience as an ethical exercise¹⁰.

Thus, I agree with the authors when they suggest that the TCLE should be considered as a principle, but not as model of procedure. The form of consent depends on the manner in which the relationship between the researcher and the research subject is established and developed. This applies to anonymity, another aspect to be negotiated and decided with the informants. To be clearly explicit on these matters, throughout the entire research study, gives the ethical dimension of qualitative research.

In this perspective, it is fundamental to highlight, as the authors do, that, in qualitative research, we do research “with” human beings, which emphasizes the relational and dialogic character of research. Thus, the research should be viewed as a handicraft process that is built at every stage⁶. The consent is not “given”; rather, it is built throughout the research. It is a process that needs to be continually reiterated. Thus, the researcher often “defines, with the research subject, the aim of the study, as well as its strategies”. He/she negotiates with the research subject, his/her interlocutor, the terms of the research. Therefore, the ethical consent cannot be given in advance, before the research experience. It is present in all the stages, *in situ* and, afterwards, *ex situ*, as Ramos¹¹ puts it. I agree with the authors when they say that the principles of autonomy and beneficence, which support Resolution CNS 196/96, are encompassed in qualitative research, “due to their own characteristics”: the research subject not only consents, but also interferes in the research development.

Thus, there is a paradox in the way in which the Committees for Ethics in Research were constituted in Brazil. They were the product of an intense social struggle against the abuses of the so-called scientific research. However, they instituted other forms of denial of the Other. By universalizing assumptions and procedures of biomedical research, the guidelines ignore other fields of knowledge. The ethical discussion is related to the recognition of alterity; therefore, by taking as an universal paradigm what refers to one field of knowledge, extinguishing the differences, this basic principle is denied. Thus, again, I agree with the authors when they say that it is fundamental to elaborate specific guidelines for research studies that are oriented by the interpretative paradigm, and that these guidelines should be effectively incorporated in the CEPs, by all the members of these committees, in order to avoid their segregation in separate spaces. One last issue remains: how should these guidelines be elaborated? It is fundamental that they are approved by the scientific associations of each area of knowledge.

Collaborator

CSM Ventura translated the article into English.

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Rigor and ethics: challenges in qualitative research

Rigor e ética:
desafios na pesquisa qualitativa

Margareth Angelo³

The article in debate is extremely opportune for two reasons. First of all, although the reflection on the theme is common among qualitative researchers, its debate is unpublished in a scientific Portuguese language publication. Secondly, the text can represent the beginning a movement of reflection and debates concerning qualitative project review, doubtless necessary in Brazilian academic environment. This movement has already been improved in other countries by several authors in journals specialized in qualitative method. Those journals usually publish papers on researchers' experience in their interaction with Ethics Committees and Research Committees of health institutions.

The article's title makes me to consider my own experience with Ethics Committees, and to agree with authors' argument concerning the need of appropriate ethical guidelines to qualitative researches in health. How many of us already spent a long time answering to Ethics Committees' questions concerning our projects, explaining the reason of sample is not defined or which are the study variables? Although I have never refused to explain the requested information, many were the times that I realized I was answering questions that reflected total unawareness about principles, assumptions and qualitative investigation processes.

Qualitative research is not a variation of quantitative research¹, as seem to suggest some arguments we witnessed in our daily practice as researchers and teachers of research methodology. It is not possible to understand the qualitative research as other form of reaching the same objectives of quantitative research. How is it possible to a quantitative researcher to review strategies of qualitative sampling without understanding qualitative analytical processes and goals?

The complexity of qualitative research needs to be understood and thoroughly disseminated, in order to be properly valued. Qualitative research is still known just as a research modality that collects histories, narratives, and experience descriptions. As representatives of a discipline, we have failed to communicate the methods and the role of qualitative inquiry role to our professional colleagues and to the public in general².

The complexity of qualitative research is reflected in the way as certain ethical themes should be considered and properly analyzed, because this complexity does not allow the application of ethical protocols built for quantitative researches.

The article approaches some key-subjects in the ethical conduct in qualitative research, especially the process of informed consent and the confidentiality, which present peculiar characteristics in qualitative research context. To these ones I also join the subject of secrecy, related to the participants as well as to the findings of the research. The appropriate handling of confidential data is based on three dimensions: (a) the respect to people and their autonomy and freedom to maintain privacy and secrecy; (b) the concept that secrets can be shared as each person choose, and (c) the understanding that the promise of confidentiality acknowledge each person's desire and right to share information³.

The appropriate balance among confidentiality, autonomy and reciprocal protection is not a simple issue, and these problems when they arise are not easily solved. These aspects constitute dilemmatic moments in the research conduction that should be considered from the beginning of the research project planning. The project should reflect the transparency of researcher's actions in relation of those issues.

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For instance, in some situations, research participants could want to be identified, as in study that use Oral History or when the person has interest in personalizing the own voice, and its experience message.

The confidentiality is a point that should also be considered in the research process involving more than a participant's interview related to the shared experiences, as families or caregiver and cared for people. All of them can lead researcher to be arrested in ethical debates about research methods⁴. Participants actively engaged in the research process may wish to be known and to exercise their autonomy to reject the traditionally perceived benefits of anonymity and confidentiality⁵.

The focus of concern about ethics in research always is on the participants of the study. However, to determine the possibility of any damage to participants, the ethical care in qualitative research needs interpretive knowledge and truths of the interior experience of a person set of circumstances and time⁵.

Another relevant aspect the article approaches is of ethics in human interdependence context, present in the interaction between researcher and participants. To obtain high quality information in interviews, researcher is dependent of their partners' cooperation in the conversation and when we encouraged people to talk open and honestly about themselves, we can incur in serious ethical obligations to them⁶.

That theme leads us to the informed consent that assures all necessary information for free consent to participate in the research, and it also guarantees the absence of emotional, physical, and financial damage. Qualitative research informed consent, as the article presents, is a process and the points that eventually appear in the data collection and information handling process depends on the circumstances that are identified through dialogue carefully conducted with sensibility and respect. These ones are qualities that cannot be prescribed, controlled or intellectually applied: they should be genuinely felt and lived and infused in the relationship. They emerge in the engagement of researcher's self with the other (participant) in mutually respectful ways. They reflect, maybe always, self-applicable principles that govern and guide the life. They are ethically imperative, even if they are not ethically prescribed; they are learnt in the most fundamental level of the human experience⁷.

The consent is continually built in the relationship between researcher and participant, when decisions and agreements concerning roles

and responsibilities emerge. This process should be conceived as natural part of a relationship in qualitative research, instead a group of formally defined negotiations destined to mark the limits between researcher and participants.

How is it possible to consider all these inherent peculiarities to qualitative research if projects are submitted to rigor and ethics criteria built according to the logic of quantitative research? In fact, Ethics Committees need to join to their review procedures principles that guide qualitative research. As qualitative researcher, we need to use our voice to communicate in a better way qualitative methods and the role of qualitative methodology to the other researchers. At the same time, we need to find ways to make more thoroughly public our experiences in research and the arising ethical dilemmas. Qualitative researcher needs to know more densely about qualitative methodologies and their ethical and methodological dilemmas that will contribute to the control of research rigor.

Projects sent to Ethics Committees can contribute for our professional colleagues' learning, as we demonstrate whom we are, what we do, and what the meaning of our research work. The project should present methodological consistence to become a learning resource and not be merely a formality to obtain approval and authorization for research development. We know the degree of rejection of qualitative studies is high in financial agencies for research and in ethics committees. In the last ones, it is possible to explain doubts and to continue the review process. However, it is not always possible to appeal in case of the rejection for financial agencies. Thus, the researcher is also responsible to change understanding and appreciation of qualitative research in our academic environment.

These problems reinforce the idea that until the complexity of qualitative research is well understood, it will not be appreciated, valued and even supported².

I can say based on my own experience, that to communicate properly what we are, why we are here and what we need is a condition that can contribute to transform researchers' understanding about qualitative research. As qualitative researcher, I had the fortune of coordinating an Ethics Committee, assuming in that occasion the responsibility to explain and to communicate to those members of the committee, the principles and inherent processes to qualitative research. This was a movement that enlarged committee's possibilities, whose members have perfectly un-

derstood the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research.

This public effort is a different kind of dissemination for us. But if we intended to change the knowledge state about qualitative research in Ethics Committees and to general public, this communication should be made consciously and deliberately.

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Ethical guidelines and qualitative research on health

Diretrizes éticas
e pesquisas qualitativas em saúde

Rosa Maria Stefanini de Macedo⁴

This article aims to debate the excellent study carried out by Guerriero and Dallari¹, about "the necessity of ethical guidelines adequate for qualitative research on Health" publicized in the previous pages of this magazine,

Above all, I must say I consider this study an extremely worthy piece of work that meets the difficulties experienced by researchers and also by members of Ethics in Research on Human Beings Committees. In this aspect, it is a profound investigation searching for reasons that

justify the construction of ethical parameters for research on human beings adequate to the diversity of paradigms able to guide the research plan and its execution.

This because 196/96², resolution from the Health National Council - Conselho Nacional de Saúde - that sets ethical principles to guide research in the health field in Brazil to amplify the conception of research of the International Council of Medical Science Organizations (ICMSO)³.

This conception³ defines research as a group of activities aiming to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge.

Generalizable knowledge consists of theories, principles or relations, or in the storage of data collection which they are based on, that can be asserted by recognized scientific methodology of observation and inference¹.

Based on this definition, however, the national rule in the CNS Resolution 196/96² sees that the procedures mentioned to produce generalizable knowledge, counting on **principles or relations or in gathering up data in their foundations asserted by recognized scientific methodology of observation and inference [...], are applicable to procedures of any nature; such as instrumental, environmental, nutritional, educational, sociological, economic, physical, psychic, or biological one not mattering if they are pharmacologic, clinical or surgical with preventive, diagnostic or therapeutic purposes**¹.

Well, when we amplify the application scope of those ethical rules, the Resolution in question paradoxically plasters the research on human beings to the fields of human, social and health sciences. I say this because noticeably the worldview and therefore the science's which the announcement is based on, did not take into consideration the plurality of possible scientific paradigms, identifying itself with the premises of positivists paradigms focused on the universalization of knowledge (generalizable) confirmed by scientific methods of observation (mensurable) and therefore, able of being standardized⁴.

That the 196/96² Resolution has the biomedical area among its first concerns is understandable, but to stretch the same recommendations given to the first area mentioned, under a posi-

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tivist or post positivist paradigm, to other areas of knowledge, as if all of them followed the steps of the same paradigm, is to go far beyond disregarding the richness, diversity, complexity of knowledge improvement and also the existence of scientific paradigms that observed other worldviews.

In the United States the Belmont Report, important document from 1979⁵, which rules and protects human beings in biomedical and behavioral research, acknowledges that the social research can substantially differ from the previous ones, therefore a specific commission is necessary to define the policies for procedures that fit them better. It would be desirable that the Brazilian rule did at least the same¹.

Defending the need to recognize different possible paradigms under the conception of reality, thus under the scientific activity, we can just remember, for instance, how the comprehension of the Universe evolved, from an absolute truth until Copernicus, Kepler Galileo to contemporary Physics and Astronomy.

What can be instantaneously deduced is the fragility of a certainty based on universal, absolute, fixed truths apart from the observer. This affirmation has been excessively demonstrated by results of experiences in very different disciplines so to say Biophysics (Von Foerster, 1981), Psychology (Von Glasersfeld, 1984) Neurophysiology and Biology (Maturana e Varela, 1987) Communication (Krippendorff, 1982), Physics (Prigogine, 1980), Cybernetics (Wiener, 1948)⁶.

Consistently, the studies carried out by these scientists with an origin on a systemic view of the universe went through clearly recognizable stages:

a) From the conception stage where systems from a homeostatic mechanism keep their stability and self regulation of their structure.

b) to the conception where a system out of its balance finds alternatives of its own to self regulate its structures through creative, learning or evolutive resources, eliminating the stability idea as something static and,

c) finally concluding by the unpredictability, complexity, uncertainty and subjectivity that rules the comprehension of irreducible systemic phenomena to objective criteria of analyses and description.

Different ways to see reality necessarily imply different paradigms and consequently distinctive recommendations and ethical procedures not only concerned about the autonomy of the participants and their rights, but also with the possibility of carrying out the research.

This is because theories, principles or relations that constitute knowledge must answer basic questions about the “being” and about knowledge (ontological and epistemological) and how knowledge acquisition occurs (methodological). Therefore, the method to know comes from what is believed to be the object of knowledge (onto) and from the procedure of acquiring it (epistemic). In this way, the planning of any acts which aim knowledge, as research does, has to adequate itself to the conceptions of reality and to the process of knowing this reality with methods compatible with such conceptions in order to access them in a coherent and adequate form.

Thus the conception of reality as something given; that is there, able to be known in an objective way through quantitative methods of observation and mensuration (positivism) is applicable to the study of many phenomena, such as the ones that intend to survey the present state of a certain episode in a population and have the purpose to outline adequate intervention policies.

Researching human behavior with almost experimental approach, however, a change in the positivist paradigms comes out – the post positivist – which introduces a slight modification according to the ontological and epistemological point of view. It is admitted that the reality is given, it is there, but it can only be known in terms, partially, because its view depends on the perception of the observer. This one continues apart from the observed object, that is why there are so many recommendations about the researcher impartiality, the control of his or her subjectivity and the control of the research variables in order not to “contaminate” the results obtained in the procedure.

A question could be raised then when drawing up a test, a questionnaire. In accordance with the theory which seems to the researcher the most reasonable one isn't he subjectively choosing predefined aspects of the phenomenon to be observed? If this isn't enough, when he ranks answers in descriptions measured by frequency, isn't he judging the answers obtained from the participants through subjective values?

These difficult epistemological issues have been putting the science field, mainly the human and social sciences at some impasses, and they justify a feverishly intellectual activity among tenacious researchers dealing with a plural reality. Some of them cited above.

This activity doesn't represent any specific school with unifying pretensions.

This pragmatic change of position, which the

systemic-cybernetic perspective puts mainly on the human sciences, gives evidence to a necessity to reflect about the human subjectivity capable of being approached under qualitative methods⁷.

Under the paradigmatic approach this view responds to ontological, epistemological and methodological questions, stating that reality is only capable of being understood through the comprehension of the individual who gives names to it and therefore realizes and gives meaning to it.

In this way the paradigm's ontological and epistemological dimensions don't differ. Knowledge subject and object can't be put apart, since to know something is to construct reality aiming to describe and give it meaning. Then, we have that the act of knowing is endowed with value as observers select, according to their perception of reality aspects, describing and giving them names which match their life experiences, context, society, culture and the linguistic community they live in. The paradigm that favors the theory of experimentation is deconstructed and an alternative based on intersubjectivity is constructed.

In that, qualitative investigation finds its space between explaining and comprehending, requiring a sympathetic and equitable ethical attitude which sets researchers and participants in positions of exchangeable and reversible power.

The polysemic nature of the discourse is highlighted as well as the importance of the dialogue during the construction of meaning and the subjective aspect of this construction that will be negotiated among participants. In such a way reality is constructed by ordering and organizing our experience, making it conceptual because it is defined by language and understood as signification⁷.

Given the importance of the context, the dialogue and the negotiation of meaning among members (researcher and participant) the knowledge acquired is transferable (not generalizable) to other groups, other situations that share similarities. However, because of the multiplicity of possible contexts and the variability of people characteristics, the results are seen as an incomplete text, always capable of having finishing touches.

What about the concept of "value" and "truth" then?

How is it possible to construct a framework of valid scientific knowledge to a specific historical moment, to a society, to a community of pairs?

If the construction of reality depends on the perception of each one, will there be as many truths as the number of individuals? Do they weigh the same?

What about the value of knowledge, the re-

spect for the other, and the scientist's responsibility?

In order to avoid misunderstandings, it is very important to let clear that although knowledge is coined intersubjectively in the relations, it is only socially legitimized in an individual-cultural recursive process where the individual is conceivable as socially defined and society is seen as a system of individuals "There are no individuals without society and no society without individuals"⁸.

Then, the research on human behavior based on the reality construction paradigm or on its interpretation (hermeneutics, phenomenology, ethnography, constructivism, and constructionism) can only be guided by values, as the researcher is part of the researched issue, ethics is intrinsic to research.

It means to say that the objectivist paradigm can accept objective criteria of the good (which is accepted in a conventional way without any criticism). Inside constructive and interpretative paradigms as there is no obligation to reproduce the social reality in question, the mandatory aspect of it is the researcher's awareness about the influence that occurs during the research and in the co-construction of reality that belongs to the participants. Therefore, knowledge produced in this way implies into a responsibility that presupposes integrity and a personal sense of values, in other words: ethics.

What institution do we want to develop? What health care do we want to provide?

How to act to fulfill community needs?

Following Ravn's⁶ proposition, and taking into consideration the recommendations given by many authors involved with new paradigms and subjectivity⁹, the freedom to search a large number of possible alternatives in different perspectives gives rise to a need to accept the implicit limits of ones' own choices, what leads us straight to the ethics domain.

In this way, the researchers' attitudes are compromised with their choices and they are responsible for them towards the scientific community and towards the society in general in view of the consequences of the results the research obtains.

The major criticism to constructivist and interpretative paradigms based on qualitative research, however, is the truth relativity, the uncertainty, the unpredictability and the lack of control of the objective research. This relativity, however, doesn't nullify the concept of truth or certainty, in the same way that it doesn't deny the existence of a real world, concrete, where we live in. Such criticism is the result of an absolutist misinterpreta-

tion of the knowing process. With the purpose to explain better this conception of reality construction through interpretation and conjoined elaboration of signification giving meaning to the world, Ravn⁶ suggests a pair of propositions: The Unity and the Diversity as ethical principles. For instance, he says, a city seen in a variety of perspectives looks different in each one. However, those different universes are nothing more than different perspectives of the same universe.

An ontology that says the world is a unit of perspectives may seem unusual, given the prevailing atomic ontology of modern science, says Ravn⁶. However, he says, in epistemological terms this statement could be expressed in this way: we notice the world under different perspectives although the world we see is always the same.

So the city is a unity, the total system can be seen from many different points (sub-systems) all of them related to the major one, unique in the perspective they are seen but different from each other.

Transferring this example to reality construction we conclude that the world is essentially a unit that cannot be perceived in its totality due to the limitation of the perceiver, his or her characteristics and their context, giving then birth to different ways of seeing it.

In the research field, the phenomenon is the same, the cut-outs we make in accordance with our paradigms, our theories, lead us to different ways of approaching them, obtaining different results, where one doesn't exclude the other, they are simply different readings of several aspects of the same event.

However, in order to avoid extremities: the nihilist approach which denies any possibility of knowing and the absolute-relativism approach which attributes to any knowledge the same value without any distinction or any value strictly speaking, the construction of reality should be guided with some advantages by the already mentioned ethical principles: Unit and Diversity.

These principles should be seen as inclusive ones and not as mutually exclusive ones. The experience of unit is the one where one can experience the world in such a way that each part of it seems to evoke or to be in touch with a wider totality or unit. Each act put the individuals in contact with a greater proposal or meaning revealed in each activity, in each role they play⁶.

Diversity is the experience that different parts of the world can have different views (of the same world). This experience applies to individual and social life. A person with such attitude thinks that

the activities and objectives of other people simply express different aspects of life, such as our own when we put ourselves in different points of view⁶.

Unit and Diversity express distinctive moments but complementary ones according to the epistemology of complexity¹⁰ opposing to the simplifying linearity of the positivism, where the disjunctive thought contributes to place individuals in extreme paradoxical positions that make intermediary hues, which are part of the observed event, difficult to be contemplated. However both experiences are useful, the problem is settled when one happens to the total detriment of the other.

Depending on the intensity of the variation between Unit and Diversity, different positions are produced even some distortion can be produced. On the one hand, the maximum of Unit with any Diversity leads to absolutism, we can see it in the following statement: I have the truth; I am right; the world is in this way and there is only one way to truth". On the other hand, no Unit and the maximum of Diversity leads to total relativism. "In this position the affirmations go around of: everything is the same thing, it doesn't matter to think in a way or another, everything is true, and all goes". This posture nullifies moral values standards of any origin or priority, as it doesn't consider the quality of different affirmations and the responsibility of the one who declares them.

In the search of the good and best practices, the core of ideal ethics, the desirable position is the one which contemplates Unit inside Diversity.

This is to say that the meaning of our lives, our purposes (unit) agree with different actions and positions we take in view of specific objectives in each moment of our lives (diversity).

The basic principle of the position Unit – Diversity or Diversity – Unit in life as well as in the research is "**compromise**".

The balance between Unit-Diversity is essential when people / researchers revealed themselves compromised with the truths they built, when they are responsible for them according to the life track they chose, giving meaning to their acts, and at the same time accepting and respecting the others / people / researchers who have chosen different objectives and followed different paths, although not less worthy than their own. In this aspect, the community of pairs, the society has a fundamental role: to legitimate the truths which were built, through the dialogue, discussion, agreements and assent.

This posture is desirable not to be taken only

by people throughout their lives but also by societies, organizations and institutions, needless to say by the scientific community along with the activities scientists and researchers perform.

Besides the arguments presented by Guerriero and Dallari¹, to highlight the peculiarity of qualitative research based on other paradigms than the positivist one, I am confident that the adoption of the ethical principle of Unit-Diversity offers us room to reflection about ethical recommendations following research models respecting paradigms diversity and justifies the necessary changes of the 196/96² Resolution. I truly believe that this principle can help us to have more flexibility in research under the social-human and health sciences scope in constructive and interpretative paradigms.

That reflection, in our opinion, is much more adequate to the true scientific spirit: to recognize and respect differences, consequential of different ways to see the world, but adequately built upon the researchers' compromise, their moral judgment, their ethics, their acceptance of their pairs in accordance with social and moral rules of the culture they belong to, leading the ones in charge of legislating to act accordingly.

I do hope that the considerations here presented will contribute to widen the debate about moral principles in scientific research as I have proposed in the beginning, transferring it to the process of knowledge, to methods and procedures able to access them in a more proper way and consequently to raise the awareness that each model of research and each situation to be researched need specific ethical rules.

Certainly, this would make the scientific activity of the researchers and of the committees of ethics in research, a lot easier, contributing to a higher development of knowledge as inadequate models of judgment bring dissonant aspects, which can in turn provoke major difficulties to some projects to be approved.

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Methodological procedures and ethical decisions

Procedimentos metodológicos e decisões éticas

Franklin Leopoldo e Silva⁵

The article being commented here questions the adequacy for qualitative research of the ethical guidelines established by resolution 196/96 due the positivist paradigm that, according to the authors, would be orienting the mentioned resolution with regard to the profile of scientific research. Furthermore, the presence of this paradigm in a great number of other documents in the field of research ethics would be responsible for the inexistence of appropriate criteria for understanding health research when guided by parameters proper to human sciences.

The subject is immense, not only insofar as the epistemological aspects involved are concerned but also as refers to the scope of the domain of ethics. Before approaching some specific points it seems opportune to call attention to a question of general character.

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The knowledge forming the big area defined as Health is quite diversified covering the three great divisions of science: exact, natural and human. As a matter of fact, research into the field of health involves areas ranging from statistical mathematics to the singularity of individual socio-psychological behavior, crosscutting geography, chemistry, biology and others. That being so, there arises the difficulty to configure this diversity in a way that would allow us to refer to it as a whole, a unity, or at least as something sufficiently defined in its possibilities and limitations. For overcoming this difficulty and reaching this relative unity one chooses among the sectors composing the area those with really unquestionable characteristics of scientificity and whose criteria and scientific objectivity are clearly beyond question.

Thus, the choice falls on those research directions whose object or method is offering the typical image of scientific investigation according to standards based on kantism and positivism, considered the epistemological axes composing the modern idea of knowledge. Another contributing factor is that during the period of the methodological constitution of human sciences, most of these criteria were reaffirmed as factors of scientificity, the specificities of the knowledge about the human reality then constructed notwithstanding. The sovereignty of the traditional paradigm, this way strengthened on occasion of the very advent of human sciences, was sometimes criticized, mostly in the philosophical sphere, but not placed in check with a vigor similar to that with which for example the new physics questioned the paradigms of the aristotelic tradition.

As a consequence, the general image of science is still widely based on the positivist paradigm, just the way it was consolidated in the XIX century and refined by the discussions run in the XX century, by the theories of science and by the contributions of the history of sciences. The benchmark thus arising is to such an extent present in the conception of scientific knowledge that it figures as a norm or regulating idea even on the horizon of human sciences, a fact strongly favored by the sciences which, although dealing with aspects of the human reality, are doing this according to entirely positivist theoretical assumptions and operational schemes, economy and a great part of psychology for example. All this results in a variety of problems for qualitative health research. Here we will only highlight two of them, directly or indirectly approached in the commented article.

1. The instrumental character of the objectivist paradigm. It must be repeated that the understanding of modern knowledge contrasts, in Bacon, with the contemplative ideal of the antiquity and the Middle Ages; know the question is knowing nature in order to dominating it and make it serve human purposes. In this sense, technique is not something derived from science or its fortuitous product. Technique is deeply imbedded in the vocation of modern science, is part of its essence. Only from the basis of this inseparability modern science can define itself at the same time as knowledge and domination – as dominating knowledge. This instrumental bias manifests clearly in the character of objectivity if we, like Descartes, are to understand the objective as a reality methodically constituted from the representation of the subject, center and building axis of knowledge, technique and ethics, seen as an undissociable whole in the big rational unity of systematic knowledge. The contemporary technological development of the industrial revolution in a certain way already pointed to the reality we are living today, in which a separation of basic science from technological applications is senseless in view of the new unity represented by technoscience.

2. Human Sciences and intersubjectivity. The instrumental character of the objectivist paradigm ought to have raised ethical questions in the field of human sciences if they, since the beginning, had defined themselves as knowledge in which Man is subject and object at the same time. This did not happen due to the dominion of the objectivist paradigm, which in this regard assumed that all knowledge has to constitute itself as subject-object relation. This methodological assumption gave rise to a bifurcation of the subject so that it could also appear as the object of the “Human Sciences”, what finds a remote precedence in the Cartesian *reflection* according to which the subject looks at itself in order to find itself as object. The objectivist theory leveled subject and object under the pretext of separating them methodologically. This is the reason why intersubjectivity remained a philosophical problem: when it comes to seeing it scientifically, intersubjectivity should transform into an objectified phenomenon – in a relation objectively exposed to the theoretical vision of a knowing subject.

Thus, given the imperative need of objectivizing the subject, the relation between researcher and researched is never seen as a case of intersubjectivity. The methodological demand for objectivation does not allow a relation of knowl-

edge between *two subjects* to be established. The ethical implication of this last point seems very clear but, as one can observe, there is an intimate relation with the first, as it were a continuation; the ethical question is present in both and cannot be separated from the epistemological approach. In fact, if the conditions of objectivation in the humanities are to be maintained it would be completely inappropriate to define any research involving two subjects as intersubjectivity. In this case however it must be pointed out that - the alternative being the relation subject-object - the vision of the *other* as object arises as a necessary requirement, and thus the correlated ethical problems will inevitably appear.

The most interesting is that this menace of reification is arising from the humanist ambition to use knowledge for extending the dominion of Man over things. The paradox of humanism consists in the fact that its historical persistence, encouraged by the progress of science and technique, might end up in a vision depriving the human being from its humanity, shall say, completely substituting the subject by the object.

Such effects are not perceived in all their seriousness and ethical extent because they occur first in form of methodological requirements of objective rigor, adherence to which would be natural in a scientific research. Thus, an ethics commission will search in a submitted protocol for those requisites usually considered marks of scientificity and, once identified, the commission will try to find out if the proponents took the precautions necessary in research involving humans, informed consent for example.

The crucial question posed in the article is about what the commissions will not find because they were not looking for it: specific research procedures in an investigation that in no moment considers the human subject an object. In this case the methodological procedures are so to say a continuation of the ethical precautions because none of the phases of the research would have been conceived according to positivist and objectivist criteria. The question raised by the article is if the ethics commissions are prepared for examining projects of this *other nature*.

This is the reason for the recommendation to revise and amplify the normative resolutions making them contemplate these cases. In this sense, the article points not only to the need for epistemological reflection about the paradigms of scientificity in force but also for ethical reflection reaching beyond a critical examination of this model.

O autor responde

The author replies

The debater's texts are very well written and with a sound basis, which is not surprising considering that they are all experienced authors. As Franklin Leopoldo puts it, [...] *our starting point was the acknowledgement that the general image that we have of science is still that of the positivist paradigm, as found in the 19th Century, which is also situated as a norm of regulating idea in the humanistic sciences, by and large including Psychology*. We partially agree with this statement, since Psychology was founded as an independent science in the midst of a crisis: how to reach objectivity – seen as essential for the production of modern scientific knowledge – if this knowledge is produced by an individual with their own subjectivity? How to apply the scientific method – planned for the Natural Sciences – to the study of subjectivity? Different psychologists have sought several ways of carrying out their pieces of research and have, from the beginning, made explicit two opposing lines of thought: one that believes that challenge lies in the development of a scientific Psychology – as *per* criteria set forth by the Natural Sciences –, and another that understands that Psychology should seek its own methodology, since its object of study is not apprehensible by the former method. The difference found in this search for the most appropriate method, or the method that may be possible for this area is still present at the basis of the many existent schools of thought in Psychology. However, to find out the opinion of “the majority of the” psychologists would require specific study. This statement, nonetheless, leads us to the importance of acknowledging that what is at stake are the different scientific paradigms and not the different professional categories, since, as Franklin points out, there are actually different standpoints even among psychologists. Thus, being within the “Social Sciences and the Humanities” does not guarantee that ideas are shared. Will van den Hoonaard also calls attention to this when he states that there are different ways of defining research and that, for this reason, there are qualitative researchers that do not consider this kind of work a different paradigm. Franklin Leopoldo also states that “[...] modern science can be defined both as knowledge and dominance – as dominating knowledge.” This power relationship transcends that of nature dominance and is established among humans, *thus, the relationship between the researcher and the*

subject of research is never seen as a case of intersubjectivity since the latter must necessarily be objectified. Objectification as a methodological requirement does not allow for the establishment of a knowledge relationship between two subjects."

Franklin Leopoldo brilliantly discusses one of the core issues at stake, when he points out that the Committees of Ethics in Research - CEPs "[...] will not find specific procedures for research in which the human subject is not, at any time, taken as an object, because they have not sought it." This is indeed a central issue which radically changes the quality of relationship between researcher and researched, and it should be considered in the ethical analysis of these projects, which are already taking the necessary steps to acknowledge and respect the "other" who is involved in the research. Cynthia Sarti also highlights this matter when she refers to the free and informed consent given by the researched, or as she puts it: "The procedure by which the consent is given depends on how the researcher-researched relationship is established and developed [...]." In hierarchical relationships, such as the ones seen in the professional-patient relationship, there can be – and there usually is – the identification of knowledge and power which, as Cynthia reasons, would lead us to the risk of symbolic violence. Qualitative researches, however, are carried out with human beings, and seek to establish a dialogical relationship.

Rosa Macedo points out the importance of respecting different scientific paradigms due to the fact that the adoption of a method – regardless of whether it is qualitative or quantitative – must be coherent with the "[...] concept of reality and the knowledge process within that reality." Referring to the "dramatic paradigmatic change established by the cybernetic-systemic approach", she states that "reality can only become knowledge when the subject that perceives it gives it meaning by naming it." Therefore, "the paradigm that supports theory and experimentation is deconstructed, and an intersubjectivity-based alternative is constructed." The need to "objectify" the "object" of study (even if it is a human being) is thus overcome. Now the proposal is that knowledge be produced in this intersubjective locus, which assumes the need for the interaction between – at least – two subjects. Cynthia Sarti goes along the same direction when she maintains, "if the relationship is not adequately established for both parties, the research *per se* will not be feasible." This highlights that in such researches, ethical and methodological aspects are intertwined. Margareth Angelo also considers the consent as

a process, and that the questions that arise are identified *by means of a dialogue that is carefully conducted with sensitivity and respect. These are qualities that cannot be prescribed, controlled or intellectually applied: they must be authentically felt and experienced [...] in the relationship. They emerge within the engagement of the researcher's self with the other (the participant), in mutually respectable manners [...] they are ethically imperative, even if not ethically prescribed; they are learnt in the most fundamental of human experience.* For this very reason, if these researches are evaluated merely by their formal aspects – such as the written consent term – one could consider them not to be in conformity with the Brazilian norms of ethics in research, when, in fact, what happens is precisely the opposite: because the ethical aspects are inseparably incorporated to the researcher's routine, they do not feel the need to record such terms in writing. Or the researcher could even consider that "putting it in writing" would distance the relationship which had been so carefully built with the researched. Therefore, instead of protecting the subject of the research, the procedure jeopardizes the study – which might even have been planned with the researched. Thus, unwillingly, the CONEP-CEP system is stepping back when it requires that procedures – which have already been overcome in the kinds of researches discussed here – are followed, on the grounds that deciding the objective and the procedures together with the researched community is much more than requesting consent for taking part in a research designed solely by the researcher. The quality of data collection/generation, as well as their analysis will depend on the relationship established between the researcher and the researched. Besides, the very knowledge validation process will depend on the dialogue between the two parties, besides peer approval. Cynthia Sarti advances when she affirms that: *Therefore, in order to validate itself, every scientific area of study is constituted from the dialogue between the researcher and their peers; in Anthropology it is also based on the conditions established in dialogues between researcher and researched.* After all, as Will van den Hoonaard reminds us, the *forte* of qualitative research is its ability to show how the researched understands and experiences their social world – which will lead the researcher to check with the researched if their understanding was adequate.

In the context in which the researched is not an "object" of study, and in which the researcher is, as Will van den Hoonaard points out, part of

the produced knowledge, the researcher has the sole responsibility over their own acts. Rosa Macedo restates Ravn's proposal and claims "unity and diversity" as ethical principles, both expressing "distinct, yet complementary moments". She concludes that "[...] the problem is established when one (unity or diversity) is carried out to the total detriment of the other (unity or diversity)."

Along the same line, Cynthia Sarti considers that the problem is the "hegemony of one over the other", which is what happens in Resolution 196/96 and its complementary regulations – which adopt a research concept referenced in the post-positivist paradigm and claims to be applicable to all types of researches.

The debaters emphasize that qualitative research must be consistent and scientific sound, and must consider the historical backgrounds. It is important to remember Rosa Macedo's words: [...] ***the planning of any activity aiming at knowledge construction, including research, must adapt to the notion of reality and to the knowledge process of that reality, by using methods that are compatible to such notion so as to have adequate, coherent access to it.*** This shows that there is no methodology that is hovering in the air. On the contrary, they must be firmly founded in the paradigm that guides the researcher's work, who, in turn, must be coherent with the theoretical frame adopted. Besides, it is also important to say that, although we have focused on qualitative research, there is no intention on our part to dichotomize between qualitative and quantitative methods and techniques, since they can all be used in different paradigms, and even in the same study, bringing important and different information that, when well organized, will contribute to the understanding of phenomena and their complexity. The need for specific guidelines for social and humanistic sciences is grounded on the fact that many of the researchers from these areas adopt interpretative and critical paradigms, which radically differ from the post-positivist paradigm adopted by the Resolution 196/96. We also need to highlight Cynthia Sarti's statement that in the Social Sciences and the Humanities, different paradigms coexist, and this allows for the "coexistence of distinct frames". It would not be the role of the guidelines on ethics in research to establish hegemony of one over others. In fact, this would be ethically inadequate.

We agree with Cynthia when she states that "there is consensus as to the need to normalize research procedures, in their ethical aspects, in all epistemological areas." However, in qualitative researches that are framed within interpretative and critical paradigms, ethics becomes intrinsic to methodological aspects. Thus, the task which the CONEP-CEP system has when analyzing qualitative research would be to verify if they are consistently designed, since the possibility of ethical inadequacies is intimately related to an inconsistent project, possibly designed by researchers whose methodological background was inadequate. This is also the concern put forward by Margareth Angelo when stating that: "The qualitative researcher needs to be solidly educated [...]" As stated by Will van den Hoonaard, when qualitative research migrates from the realm of social and humanistic sciences, and are adopted by other professionals – as occurs in the collective health – the methodologies themselves are changed. One needs to pay close attention to these changes, to see if they bring new ideas, but maintain internal consistency, or if they were modified with no knowledge of their background. In the analysis of papers that were indexed at MEDLINE¹, we identified conflicts that, in actual fact, were a result of lack of clarity from the researcher's part about their own place in the research field – a matter so intensely discussed in the Social Sciences and the Humanities, and that might have gone unnoticed by professionals of other areas. To summarize, we can say that there is a lot to explicit on the different notions of qualitative research and about the scope of specific guidelines for the analysis of their ethical aspect.

Reference

1. Guerriero ICZ. *Aspectos éticos das pesquisas qualitativas em saúde* [tese]. São Paulo (SP): Faculdade de Saúde Pública/Universidade de São Paulo; 2006.