

Making Claims that Matter: Heuristics for Theoretical and Social Impact in Qualitative Research

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Abstract

Scholar activists draw on a variety of theoretical, methodological, and practical tools for creating and sustaining social justice. We argue that data analysis—in addition to research design, participation, and community engagement—can be leveraged to engage in scholarship for social good. This essay contributes to that effort by offering a set of data analytic heuristic devices for qualitative researchers. These heuristic devices include community cocktail party, conjecturing claims, Jeopardy research questions, phronetic claims, carrying claims, and tightening claims. We outline each heuristic device's use, purpose, underlying philosophical commitments, and how it aids analytic thinking that serves the pursuit of justice. Using these devices provides opportunities for making claims that matter and strengthening the impact of qualitative research.

Keywords

qualitative research, methodologies, pragmatism, methods of inquiry, social justice, grounded theory, participatory action research

In recent years, there have been many calls for academics to engage in research that addresses pressing social issues (Frey, Pearce, Pollack, Artz, & Murphy, 1996; Swartz, 2005). Some advocate for an increase in action-oriented research (Brydon-Miller, Kral, Maguire, Noffke, & Sabhlok, 2011). Others engage in phronetic research that is aimed at helping people make practically wise, contextually attentive decisions (Flyvbjerg, 2004a). Still others enact scholarship that promotes justice in society (Hartnett, 2010; Mertens, 2007). Advocates of social justice argue that scholars have the ability and responsibility to respond to the challenges that influence the people who are the most marginalized, impoverished, and oppressed (Frey & Carragee, 2007).

There is a growing wealth of writing on how to make an impact with our research. Advocates of community-based participatory research (CBPR) lay out various strategies and processes for comingling the work of scholarship with labor for a better world (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). We laud these methodological advancements. CBPR and other activist methodologies call researchers to attend to who participates in the research, what impact the research has in the community, how the various stakeholders are respected throughout the project, and what liberatory and life-enhancing outcomes are accomplished by the project.

The aim of this article is to offer a set of ethnographic and qualitative analysis tools for scholars committed to doing

action-oriented scholarship. Although we agree that involving stakeholders and attending to various community needs are critical for good activist scholarship, we also hold that the process of qualitative data analysis can be leveraged to enable socially relevant action. For action-oriented scholarship to be its most powerful, researchers can and should build upon the thick description of their findings to make claims and arguments that will resonate to other sites of political and social relevance.

Because we take a pragmatic, phronetic approach and strive to work in critical and social justice contexts, this article delineates how we might move beyond summative statements about clusters of data. We ask, “How might we analyze so as to create claims that challenge and transform oppressive structures and discourses that disenfranchise and marginalize?” We want our ideas to move people to action. We want them to speak to academics, professionals, policy makers, and citizens. As such, our claims must be made *from* the data, yes, but also *to* diverse stakeholders *within* broader contexts of scholarship and society. Although some

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analytic strategies suit critical and justice-oriented scholarship (Charmaz, 2011), heuristic devices also help bridge this gap. Generative thought experiments and creative investigative frameworks can help drive qualitative scholarship that works toward justice.

Although one cannot force creativity, certain practices foster it. Heuristic devices are metacognitive strategies—modes of thinking in ways to create new forms of thinking (Abbott, 2004). Heuristic devices lower the cognitive barriers to invention by offering generative frameworks and can enable researchers to think in new and valuable ways (Hellawell, 2006). The tools offered herein focus on a range of strategies. Some of them focus on how to make claims that matter. Others offer strategies for interrogating and deepening claims. Still others offer ways of strategically framing the project as a whole. As a set, these heuristics aim to create claims that (a) emerge directly from the study (sites, lived experiences, data, etc.), (b) meaningfully advance conceptual or theoretical conversations, and/or (c) improve our ability to make practically wise decisions and construct humane and just societies.

The heuristic tools we present are synthesized from various scholarly traditions. Some are mainstays of qualitative research, like negative case analysis from grounded theory. Others are derived from the works of philosophers out of the tradition of American Pragmatism (James, Pierce, Rorty). Still others are drawn from contemporary writers (like Flyvbjerg). The heuristic devices presented here are assembled from these writers' work that pertained to the creation or critique of ideas.

This article draws together disparate writings on logic, critique, and analysis, and proposes a set of coherent heuristic tools—all of which are useful for qualitative scholars interested in practical impact, activism, and change. We offer them as step-by-step processes to make them accessible in the midst of data analysis. By presenting them together and applying them holistically to a single case, this article provides a resource for showing how these tools can be used in conjunction with each other and help qualitative research generate social action. We hope this approach is helpful to both new and veteran qualitative researchers, as well as to instructors of qualitative methods.

In the sections that follow, we outline claim-making, claim-deepening, and project-framing heuristics for qualitative research. For each device, we explain the basic function, its underlying logic, the structure of the heuristic, strategies for using the device, and how the device contributes to doing impactful research. Together, we describe six heuristic devices:

- community cocktail parties,
- conjecturing claims,
- Jeopardy research questions,
- phronetic claims,

- carrying claims, and
- tightening claims.

The examples used to illustrate each heuristic device are drawn from the first author's community-based qualitative research project focused on nonprofit organizations, homeless young adults, and compassion. The research project involved a three-and-a-half-year relationship with a nonprofit called StandUp For Kids, which provided food, water, clothing, hygiene, safe space, professional development, and relationships to homeless young adults. The project sought to draw on communication scholarship to improve the processes of that and similar organizations while also drawing on the experiences of homeless young adults to deepen communication theories on compassionate communication. The case examples are offered in first-person voice, as they represent the first author's use of the heuristics delineated in this article.

Community Cocktail Party

Before engaging in robust claim making, it can be very helpful to ask, "Who am I making these claims to?" The community cocktail party heuristic device walks researchers through a series of questions that help position their claims both strategically and theoretically within the communities they hope to engage. Good scholarly representations effectively throw conceptual cocktail parties and invite the right people to make the most stimulating conversation, and good activist representations resonate with relevant stakeholders. Huff (1999) encourages academic writers to imagine their papers as rooms that are crowded with conversing scholars. The metaphor of the cocktail party lives in the tradition of Burke's (1941) unending conversation.

Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. (pp. 110-111)

This metaphor very aptly accounts for the scholarly process. In practical terms, the author has control over who participates in the most immediate version of the conversation, namely, the paper. Of course, when others read the paper, they may draw others into the conversation (and potentially chastise the author for excluding particular voices). But the overall point is this: to cite someone is to invite them into conversation.

When considering how to position a project in nonacademic communities, Rorty's (1979) critique of empiricism

offers a helpful framework. Rorty makes the case that there are no privileged representations of reality. Justification of claims, then, is always partial and never ultimate. And yet, people continue to justify claims. The fact that ultimate representation is not possible does not stop humans everywhere from engaging in various practices to legitimize and authenticate knowledge claims. This sort of justification is a social practice, a peer-driven epistemic enterprise that determines whether a particular claim made by a particular person is worthy of assent or rejection.

Thinking about the processes of knowing in this way is not to cast knowledge into an endless sea of relativism. Rather, inspired by Rorty's pragmatist commitments, like Dewey (1939) and James (1904), thinking of knowledge in terms of community-based criteria and warrants becomes a window into action-oriented scholarship. Without seriously considering what a particular community considers credible, it is all but impossible to engage in scholarship that draws together diverse communities to think and act together.

Structure of the Community Cocktail Party

This heuristic device draws from a series of questions posed by Tracy (2013) on focusing the data analysis. It begins with "Which literatures or theories am I already acquainted with?" The researcher needn't list every framework but should brainstorm all literatures related to the study, and perhaps even a few that are not intuitively related but may provide insight.

The second line of questions turns the researcher to their data/scene by asking, "Given the data I've collected, read, and coded so far, what are some interesting themes, issues, and/or claims emerging from this project?" These themes and claims are brought into conversation with prior expertise by asking, "Do these themes meaningfully intersect with the literatures and theories that I am already acquainted with? How so?" A follow-up includes "In what ways do these themes intersect with literatures and theories that pair well with qualitative methods?" Finally, the researcher pushes beyond their current expertise by asking, "In what ways do these themes intersect with literatures or theories that I'm unfamiliar with but am drawn to and willing/have time to learn more about?" This approach is cognizant of the practical limitations of acquiring expertise in new theoretical frames. It takes significant effort to become conversational in a new literature, so it helps to be thoughtful about how that time is best spent.

Having considered the intersection between emerging themes and scholarly frames, the researcher then asks the iconic, imaginative question, "Who is part of my community cocktail party?" In other words, who does the researcher plan to enter into a dialogue with through the study? This question is best answered by naming specific scholars if

possible, and if not possible, specific disciplines or subdisciplines. Given the vast depth and breadth of most academic studies, there are a near endless number of books and articles to cite. Thinking in terms of a cocktail party accomplishes a few important tasks. It calls the researcher to include the scholarly voices that will lead to the best possible conversation. The researcher should also consider what voices from their field need to be included in the conceptual thrust of the project.

The researcher then turns outward and asks, "Who are the potential audiences of my study?" "Who would benefit, appreciate, and learn from this study and why?" and "Who do I want to notice and read this work?" By thinking in terms of audience, the researcher begins to establish the value proposition of the work. It helps to think specifically about the nonacademic communities with whom the researcher wants to connect. "What does that group consider adequate support for knowing?" This might include different types of representation (numerical, visual, auditory, anecdotes, stories). However, it is important to remember relational or role-based foundations for support. Some communities might only be persuaded by people with certain degrees. Other communities might demand the author have some relevant lived experience that suggests they actually understand what life is like for them. Most communities have language styles they find most persuasive. There may be formal or informal vetting or induction that must happen before a community considers the ideas of a particular person. Still other communities rely on relational networks to establish the trust needed to authenticate claims. Many communities also find knowers more or less credible based on a set of traits held by the person. These traits might be moral, social, physical, demographic, geographic, or experiential. When imagining the ways a particular community seeks justification, the researcher is wise to be broad minded and honest. Who does the community respect the claims of already? What traits do those claims have, and what traits to the claim makers have? Imagining the standards for justification for each community enables the question, "Can I support my claim using their standards? If not, can I engage in a task to better support my ideas?" These questions of justification and support can also nuance or alter the initial claim as the various knowing criteria highlight parts of the claim that may have been unarticulated.

Given the answers to the questions above, the researcher asks, "What are two to four primary areas of literature or theory that may best situate and contextualize my study? What are the gaps, controversies, or unanswered questions in these literatures?" This answer then becomes the next step for investigation. The gaps, controversies, and unanswered questions become high value places to connect the claims emerging from the analysis, as well as arguments for the importance of the project overall. This clarity can guide

the formulation of research questions, as well as additional data-gathering practices.

Strategic Use of the Community Cocktail Party

This heuristic is especially valuable when researchers are struggling to articulate the goal, audience, or foundational literatures for their project. Asking for specific people and literatures serves as a challenge to move from vague claims to targeted and supported ones. This heuristic can be practiced even before research questions are answered and resolved, as it provides a sense of what needs to be answered to move forward. The series of questions we pose in terms of determining one's community cocktail party device may be most useful about two thirds of the way through the data collection but before the researcher is finished, after a data immersion cycle, and after some initial claim-making activities (Tracy, 2013).

With regard to thinking about community-based ways of knowing, there are no established criteria for what equates to useful wisdom for any one group of people. Furthermore, communities rarely explicitly articulate the foundations of their justification for what is useful or valuable. As such, researchers often have to try to figure out these implicit expectations through listening (and reading) carefully and noticing what each community cocktail party member finds valuable. Actually talking to the people impacted and asking them about the types of media that they read and what is most convincing to them are key practices as well. Researchers might ask, "When is the last time you transformed what you thought or did in the world based upon what you read or saw, and what was it that made you change your mind or change your way of being?" and then listen to what emerges.

Example From Project With Homeless Young Adults

In 2011, I (the first author) had been working in the field with homeless youth for several years, and among other things, I was interested in issues of nonprofit organizing, altruism, and positive communication in organizations. At the time, I was acquainted with a few relevant areas of scholarship, including nonprofit and volunteer literature, emotion and compassion issues in organization, and homelessness. Because physical presence in care was emerging as salient, I chose to focus on the process theories of compassionate communication (Miller, 2007; Way & Tracy, 2012). In particular, I saw the embodied component of homelessness to be a potentially valuable way of making explicit the ways human bodies enact the processes of compassion. At this time, I also realized that I wanted my community cocktail party to include researchers who studied social justice and communication. Based on the kinds

of arguments I would be making, I chose a few journals that had previously published work on compassion, applied nonprofit communication, or social justice communication (such as *Western Journal of Communication*, *Communication Monographs*, *Human Relations*, and *Management Communication Quarterly*).

In addition to scholarly papers written about the compassion project, I also developed presentations at regional conferences on homelessness, trainings of nonprofit staff in human services, and direct action within several nonprofit organizations. When presenting to professionals in human services organizations, the theoretical arguments were less valuable than simply reviewing sample instances from the data and discussing claims made as principles for guiding practice. The shapes of the claims for each audience were different. Just as importantly, for some audiences, my ability to demonstrate having a few years of experience in human services legitimized my arguments. Homeless young adults often did not take people seriously until they knew them and had seen them around (or at least had heard from their friends that the researcher was all right). For both the young adults and nonprofit staff, the ideas of the researcher were authenticated by the lived experience of the researcher as opposed to a formal structure of the claims.

How the Community Cocktail Party Is Useful for Doing Research With Impact

The community cocktail party clarifies the context the claims will be operating within. Specifically, the community cocktail party device helps provide big-picture strategy to improve claim making. Thinking about community-based justification can be used to establish the criteria for making claims within various communities. It is best used on core claims and claims that are relevant to the stakeholding communities.

Conjecturing Claims Through Abductive Reasoning

Qualitative research is powerful because of its ability to follow threads of logic throughout inquiry. It can do this because of its nimble data collection and iterative analytic strategies (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013). By responding to interesting and surprising realities, the researcher can conjecture, investigate, and offer new explanations. This capacity of qualitative research is empowered by abductive reasoning, or what its creator, Charles Peirce (1903), calls the logic of guessing.

There is a lot of talk about qualitative reasoning being inductive. And induction is certainly very appropriate, as the basic question of inductive reasoning is, "Do I have enough data to make a strong argument?" But inductive reasoning is, by design, not about leaps of logic. As such, it is

not the *only* logical form needed to create new knowledge. Abduction, however, is expressly founded in conjecture (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Abductive reasoning is the inverse of deductive reasoning. Deductive reasoning draws conclusions from nested claims. Abduction, however, begins with the conclusion and posits possible claims that would have led to it (Peirce, 1903). Abduction doesn't *prove* claims. Rather, an abductive link gives reason to suspect. It limbers the possibility of something potentially interesting and valuable in the research.

Structure of Abductive Reasoning

Abduction has four steps in qualitative research:

1. Find a surprising fact in the data (e.g., Dad freaked out after being asked a simple question).
2. Conjecture a claim that if it were true, the surprising fact would be a matter of course (e.g., Maybe Dad freaked out because he hadn't eaten lunch, and it wasn't really about the question).
3. Try to articulate how the claim would actually lead to the surprising fact. If it does, there is reason to suspect that it is true (e.g., Not eating recently causes his blood sugar to be lower, which can make him grumpy).
4. Look for other support (e.g., Let's ask dad if he had lunch, wait until he eats, ask our question again, and see how he reacts).

The research begins by searching the data for surprising facts. Of course, surprise is not an objective reality but is based on assumptions and both mediated/discursive and lived experience. That said, surprise is a useful signpost for the researcher because it signals a need for explanation. Once the surprising facts have been identified, the researcher imagines possible claims that would account for the fact. When imagining possible reasons, the researcher should focus on the reasons that, if a person knew them to be true, the surprising fact would no longer be surprising. This framework helps the thinker focus on the accounts worth revealing.

Following conjecture, it is good practice to explicitly articulate how the claim leads to the surprising fact. Not being able to answer this does not disprove the new claim, but tracing the causal chain forces the researcher to fully imagine the connection. Once the connection between the new claim and the surprising fact is drawn, the researcher may turn, if desired, to deductive and inductive forms of reasoning to more fully support the claim.

Strategic Use of Abductive Reasoning and Claim Conjecture

Contrary to popular opinion, Sherlock Holmes' famous leaps of logic are not deduction but abduction (Carson,

2009). Observing and imagining possible explanations is a common investigative trope; this heuristic essentially encourages researchers to "play detective" with their data in ways that help them think creatively about what is happening. Abductive reasoning is also powered by the salience of surprise. For Peirce (1903), surprise was an important component of inquiry, as surprise disrupts the otherwise fluid process of sensemaking (Campbell, 2011). Focusing on the startling aspects in our qualitative research helps reveal assumptions, generate interesting claims, and begin the process of deciding where to focus. Abductive reasoning can be practiced during data-oriented investigation by generating early-stage guesses at causal frameworks that can be further investigated. Further fieldwork can look to the links posited by abduction, and interview questions can be designed to probe along possibilities. As a late-stage form of analysis, abduction can make summative claims about what is operating in the context of the study. In the late stage, researchers can use collected data to critique or support abducted claims or go back into the field to collect more targeted data.

Example From Project With Homeless Young Adults

1. Surprise: I was struck by how often homeless young adults referred to volunteers' physical presence and embodied acts when talking about care.
2. Conjecture: Physical presence communicates care.
3. Articulation: By being physically present and using their body, volunteers and staff demonstrate how much they care.
4. Look for support: Are all instances of presence seen as caring and compassionate? Are there nonembodied examples of care and compassion?

How Conjecturing Claims Is Useful for Doing Research With Impact

Conjecturing claims using abduction is particularly apt for doing qualitative research aimed at social justice for two reasons. The first is its focus on surprise. The device calls for explanations for phenomena that disrupt by focusing the research on the aspects of the scene that catch, pinch, or startle a researcher. The second reason is because abduction is designed to invite possibility. By enabling wild imagination, the researcher names possible connections, otherwise left unarticulated. For many wickedly complicated social issues, not only are there undervoiced stakeholders but there are also problems and solutions that are underarticulated. Those social issues benefit from creative thinking for creating possibility.

Jeopardy Research Questions

The Jeopardy research questions heuristic device draws from the tradition of iterative research design. In hypothesis-driven, linear scientific thinking, the question or hypothesis happens (at least formally) before data collection and analysis. And, research questions, certainly, can be usefully designed in the beginning of a qualitative project so as to guide the research (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010). In iterative inquiry, researchers move back and forth between question and answer, collection and hypotheses (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, due to typical conventions, most journal article readers expect research questions to be written in a deductive fashion, even though qualitative research is usually inductive or iterative (Tracy, 2012). As such, most editors desire research questions to come first in the article, even though in practice they may be revisited and redesigned throughout the research.

In the game show Jeopardy, the answer is worded in the form of a question. In fact, the game show was originally called, “What’s the Question.” This reverse framework, that a person is given the answer and has to come up with the question, can prove to be a helpful heuristic device for qualitative claim making. Research questions can shape researchers’ interpretations as they move toward writing. This heuristic device invites the researcher to generate questions by highlighting the fact that the big pile of qualitative data they have amassed through data collection now contains answers. At the end of data collection, the trick is to figure out the questions for which they already have answers. Sometimes there are answers to the original guiding research questions. However, given the iterative and grounded nature of qualitative methodology—especially when attuned to contextual and participant-influenced foci—the data collected may be somewhat (or wholly) different than what was originally planned.

As for the generative logic of the Jeopardy research questions heuristic device, it is rooted in helping researchers overcome analysis paralysis. Qualitative data analysis is an intensive, detail-oriented process. Researchers can get stuck in coding and codebooks (Saldaña, 2015). The Jeopardy research questions heuristic invites the researcher to make data-oriented claims in a way that moves them away from data categorizing and toward a draft.

Structure of Jeopardy Research Questions

This heuristic device has a simple structure.

1. What is a statement my data make?
2. What question(s) does that statement answer?
3. Follow-up question (which links back to the community cocktail party heuristic): What (intellectual or practice) communities would value the answer to this question?

In the first step, researchers read their data and the results of their coding or other analysis. Then, they try to make claims that emerge from the text. During this stage, we encourage researchers to be bold; make strong, interesting claims even if the claims might not (yet) be supportable. Later in the process, through mechanisms like negative case analysis (which is discussed below), unsupported claims will get thrown out. But with many creative processes, being overly critical can stymie production. Also, brainstorming a long list of statements has value. Trying to say the right thing narrows creativity and turns on the critic mind. In this stage, researchers should open up to possibility, articulate many ideas, and then later bring in their inner critic to weed them out.

Once the researcher has a list of claims, he or she then posits questions that the claims answer. There may be overlap here, because one claim may be the answer to several questions and several claims may be the answer to one question. So, which questions are the most valuable? Good research questions are those that build upon work and conversations from one’s conceptual cocktail community. Reading other authors’ recommendations for “future research” can be very useful in terms of knowing how to frame one’s own current research questions, so that they contribute to ongoing practical dilemmas or gaps in the research. Also, research questions are best when they serve as logical links between the study at hand and related works. Researchers can consider how to incorporate the technical/theoretical language found in similar work into their questions. This signals to readers what they can expect, constitutes the audience linguistically, and honors prior work.

Strategic Use of Jeopardy Research Questions

The Jeopardy research questions heuristic generates claims from the data and possible research questions. It is best used following data immersion while also considering published literature and potential audiences. Asking Jeopardy research questions is especially useful following coding efforts. At this stage, we encourage people to generate many claims and then ask,

Which are the claims that you know something about (e.g., those that encompass literatures or theories with which you are familiar or willing to explore)? Which are new and would extend or complicate existing scholarship? Which just seem most interesting or moving to you or your participants? Which are most surprising? Now, what is a research question that, when posed, these claims would answer?

Example From Project With Homeless Young Adults

Following an in-depth data immersion process in my study of homeless young adults’ experience of compassion while

accessing services in nonprofit organizations (Huffman, 2013, 2017), I noticed that the young adults talked about being patronized or having their needs assumed. At the same time, my fieldwork showed that these negative interactions might happen even though I or a staff member was trying to be caring. I also noticed that a variety of scholars studying positive organizational scholarship were asking questions at the intersection of positive and negative phenomena in organized life. Doing some review of literature on emotions, care, and compassion, I generated the question, “How can the experiences of homeless young adults in nonprofit organizations help understand failures in compassionate communication?” It’s important to note that this question came only *after* I had collected 2 years of data. I had answers first, then developed this research question, and then went on to collect additional data through ethnography and interviews.

How Jeopardy Research Questions Is Useful for Doing Research With Impact

The Jeopardy research questions heuristic is not an essentially impact-oriented practice. It can be used to generate questions that only satisfy requirements for publication in academic contexts. But Jeopardy research questions are very valuable in social justice-seeking research projects for two reasons. The first is that the heuristic makes excellent use of available data. It draws on the existing data and knowledge to generate novel questions. Second, the question-generation approach is valuable for nonprofit, grant-seeking, and activist rhetorical contexts because it makes use of a problem–solution structure to arguments. By looking at the data and generating questions that are relevant to key stakeholders, the researcher can leverage the research to create social change. Being able to articulate a clear problem–solution framework is often necessary for justifying projects, inspiring help, or gathering resources. In fact, the main claims of a project may answer different questions that other stakeholders have. Jeopardy research questions can help articulate these various questions.

Phronetic Claims

Some types of research, data collection, and analyses are useful toward creating generalizable knowledge. Other kinds are important for applying that knowledge or showing how to do something. That said, qualitative data may be most useful in providing resources for a third sort of knowing—the knowledge required for making wise, contextual judgments (Flyvbjerg, 2004a). Wisdom comes from contextual experience; “practical wisdom is a craft and craftsmen [*sic*] are trained by having the right experiences” (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2010, p. 26). Qualitative immersion provides access to these experiences and, therefore, is

instrumental for phronesis. Phronetic claims help others make decisions about what can and should be done.

The basis of phronetic claims comes from the distinction made by Aristotle as he teaches three forms of knowing. These forms are as follows:

- Episteme—knowledge that is abstract, hypothetical, and always/very often true;
- Techne—technical assertions, processes, and know-how based on everyday contingencies;
- Phronesis—practical wisdom that helps people make context-based judgments.

Each of the types of knowing accomplishes different objectives. Episteme accounts for broad principles about the world. Techne accounts for the process of events and how to accomplish particular aims. Phronesis guides decision making in situ. Qualitative analysis can produce all three forms of knowledge. Inductive arguments about the broad occurrence of particular phenomena undergird claims of episteme-style knowledge. Producing techne-based knowledge is best done by close attention to how processes actually happen and the outcomes of those processes. As Flyvbjerg (2006) argues, qualitative research’s attention to the particularities of a case helps people make practically wise decisions based on it.

Structure of Phronetic Claims

Phronesis is context-based judgment. As such, the principle task for a qualitative researcher who is trying to enable practical wisdom is to use the data and theorizing to reveal the salient aspects of the situation being studied that would allow actors to engage in wise and ethical activity. This is done by reproducing, as the space allows, a qualitative account of the people, places, objects, and events that are relevant to the site of study. Other forms of qualitative analysis can enable this presentation of context; presenting emergent themes or abductive claims can clarify and edify. Following the reproduction of the context, Flyvbjerg (2004b) offers four questions that can help the researcher sharpen their thinking on the subject:

1. Where are we going?
2. Who gains and who loses, and by which mechanisms of power?
3. Is this development desirable?
4. What, if anything, should we do about it? (p. 209)

Answering these questions helps the qualitative researcher make claims that aid in practical decision making in domains where there are not simply right or wrong

answers but good or bad choices and paths of wisdom and folly. Phronetic claims help inform the sensibilities that undergird how we approach pressing social issues, decide what is important and must be attended to, and shape policy and society.

Strategic Use of Phronetic Claims

The invitation to make phronetic claims can be liberating for scholars used to framing their findings in only epistemic terms. However, new considerations arise, namely, how to make claims that aid others in practical decision making. Phronetic claims do not tell people what to do, but rather provide knowledge resources that support clear choices. The following questions encourage the creation of phronetic claims:

- What would a person acting in this context need to know for them to make wise choices?
- What issues, principles, values, or dynamics should a person in this context pay attention to?
- What questions would someone need to ask to make a decision in this context?

This line of questioning encourages that we move away from purely scientific questions into the realm of action and practice.

Example From Project With Homeless Young Adults

As illustrated next, I used this approach in my work with homeless youth by simply posing the questions above and letting my answers guide potential claims and research directions.

Where are we going? At the conclusion of my pilot study with homeless youth, it was clear that some communication practices in nonprofit organizations were deeply humanizing, such as developing one-on-one relationships and working through conflicts, and others, such as projecting needs the young adults did not think they had, were insulting and infuriating to the young adults.

Who gains and loses, and by which mechanisms of power? Interactions that caused the young adult to feel uncared for deterred the use of services of that organization. What's more, when fights broke out between a staff member and homeless young adult, it was common practice to ask the young adult to leave, sometimes permanently. In both cases, negative interaction caused a service failure, which was a loss for both the young adult trying to meet basic needs and the organization trying to carry out its mission. This is

clearly an undesirable development for the youth, who lost the most in the situation.

What should we do about it? When the organization's goal was to improve services for homeless youth, one potential ameliorative to the situation was to more purposefully seek and draw on the experience of homeless young adults. In hearing their concerns and incorporating their input, the nonprofit would improve through various changes to practice, training, and policy.

How Making Phronetic Claims Is Useful for Doing Research With Impact

Phronesis is accomplished by illuminating the relevant details of a case in a way that guides judicious action. Phronetic claims offer guidance and insight into the life and operation of the context of the study. Phronetic claims need not be cast in terms of certainty or falsehood. Indeed, phronesis is most needed when there is no way to prove which path is best. Although a scientist may construct laboratory conditions to test the outcomes of two scenarios, policy makers, leaders, activists, and community members must sometimes make a decision without the luxury of knowing what would happen if they chose otherwise. Good qualitative research can provide resources to contribute to the practical wisdom of those making such choices. Phronetic claims highlight and guide and are especially valuable when researchers desire to reinforce or challenge issues of policy, practice, strategy, and tactics within both everyday and extraordinary moments.

Carrying Claims Through Pragmatic Fieldwork

Analysis need not be separated from the field or the research participants. In fact, continued presence and activity in the field can nuance, empower, tighten, and problematize analysis. "Carrying claims" is derived from pragmatic fieldwork (Huffman, 2013), which delineates a methodology for simultaneously engaging in justice-oriented social action and qualitative scholarship. The carrying claims heuristic offers a tool for deepening insights through ongoing engagement and action in the field. It calls the researcher to question how a particular idea influences action in a particular scene. The heuristic begins by the researcher making a claim and then carrying it with him or her back into the field to see how or whether the claim affects action. If the claim has little effect on his or her action, then its pragmatic force is limited (Huffman, 2013). For example, a researcher might make and carry a claim that a particular communication strategy leads to positive outcomes in a scene, but carrying the claim might never influence the researcher's

interactions. If the claim does little to inform the service, labor, or gathering practices, if it cannot connect to the efforts to act and organize, then perhaps it is of little value. If the claim offers no impetus for interesting or relevant questions, observations, reflections, or imaginations, then perhaps it does not add meaningfully to knowledge needed to operate in that community. But, on the contrary, if a claim effects the way an actor asks, observes, labors, serves, reflects, envisions, gathers, and presents, then that effect should be considered when deciding whether the claim is worthy of being better articulated and widely shared.

Structure of Carrying Claims Through Pragmatic Fieldwork

The researcher begins by clearly articulating a claim and carrying it with them (either actually on a piece of paper in a pocket or by keeping it close to mind while in the field) as they engage in eight practices. The field-worker, in no particular order (Huffman, 2013),

- *asks* people in the field questions that shed light on the claim using either formal or informal interviews and interactions;
- *observes* the comings and goings in the everyday life of the organization, scene, or community using the claim as a framing device;
- *serves* people directly in the field and uses the claim as a guide for interaction;
- *labors* in the background of the community or organization and looks to see how the claim operates in the actions that structure the scene;
- *gathers* needed material and knowledge resources and attends to the how the claim connects to the continued existence of the organization/community;
- *presents* the claim to others knowledgeable in the social context of the field;
- *reflects* on their experiences carrying the claim; and
- *envisions* the organization/community in new ways based on the claim.

As an iterative practice, pragmatic fieldwork is not a step-by-step process. Rather, the researcher carries the claim as his or her participation unfolds over time. An observation relevant to the claim might inspire asking participants a certain question. The question might lead to a new way of serving others. The new ways of serving could be reflected on and presented to others in the organization. So the process continues. Periodically, the researcher can amend or reject the claim or take up another claim to carry with them.

Strategic Use of Carrying Claims in Pragmatic Fieldwork

Researchers engaging in pragmatic fieldwork sometimes struggle with the nonlinear nature of iterative qualitative methodology. In this case, it is useful to take periodic notes about the use of the eight practices of knowing and doing (ask, observe, labor, serve, reflect, envision, gather, and present). In the beginning, researchers may simply journal on the ways they are engaging in each activity. Once claim-making activities have begun, researchers may valuably choose a claim to carry through their ongoing work in the field and shift their periodic note taking to relate to the claim being carried.

Example From Project With Homeless Young Adults

During my time with StandUp For Kids, I labored and served on behalf of the organization by training staff, going on outreach, and creating relationships with the young adults. I asked questions and observed activities for program evaluations and qualitative research projects. I reflected and envisioned to process my experiences to provide new visions of theory and how the organization could run. I gathered financial, human, and scholarly resources for the organization while also presenting on my work both within the organization and beyond. The dynamic interplay between the eight knowing/doing practices allowed me to engage in rigorous qualitative research while also contributing to the organization and its mission in various roles.

Two examples of claim carrying are as follows. During early analysis, I was convinced that nontraditional problem solving was a major driver of positive interaction between volunteers and youth, inspired in part by leader member exchange theory and dynamic boundary spanning (Lilius, Worline, Dutton, Kanov, & Maitlis, 2011)—theories that argue the importance of dynamic and nonroutine linkages between leaders and members. So I carried the claim. I drew on it as a potential resource to interpret situations in the field. However, even as I carried the claim with me, it rarely altered my behavior or provided new avenues for action. Eventually, I moved on from and dropped the claim and potential focus of nontraditional problem solving from my research. Although it might have been an interesting conceptual frame, it didn't help me make sense of issues or engage in any particular action. Later, when I had recognized the importance of physical presence emerging from my data, I began carrying the claim, "Embodied presence matters for compassion." I found that this claim resonated more in the scene; it reminded me to physically engage in care during key moments and gave my participants and myself new ideas for interacting compassionately. In short,

reflecting on that claim enabled my acts of service, reflection, envisioning, and labor.

How Carrying Claims Is Useful for Doing Research With Impact

Because carrying claims requires embodied labor, particular relationships, spent time, and occupied space, the practice can deepen and interrogate the research claims. The heuristic device can be used to assess and weigh potential claims against the life, practices, and experiences of the community. It is particularly useful for claims that connect to social action. The heuristic can be used to identify the claims that are the most vibrant, provide the most vivid sensemaking tools, and best motivate the claim holder to action. Living with claims in this way can empower activist efforts, volunteer recruitment, fundraising initiatives, and more.

Tightening Claims Through Negative Case Analysis

The most interesting claims are bold and creative. But making many bold and creative claims will almost certainly generate ideas that can be exaggerated, distorted, shortsighted, or unrepresentative. The early heuristic tools explored in this article encourage creativity and boldness. Nearer the end of the analysis cycle, it is valuable to tighten claims. One way to do this is for researchers to take their bold claims and do everything they can to disprove them. The technique can help reject weak arguments and nuance strong ones. Negative case analysis can evolve arguments so they are more specific, useful, and revealing. Often original claims critiqued by negative case analysis become deeper insights.

Negative case analysis was developed as part of the constant comparative procedure of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Grounded theory derives its power as a method by engaging in analysis while data are being collected/generated. Fieldwork, memoing, and coding (and review of relevant literature, depending on the tradition) when done simultaneously drive and influence each other. Such an iterative approach requires researchers to act as thoughtful investigators of both the emergent data and the existing literature throughout the process. Good grounded theory cannot be accomplished solely by asking a clever guiding question, collecting data on autopilot, and identifying emergent themes at the end. Analysis pushes the researcher's thinking forward, but researchers must also be willing to circle back and reexamine the data and data-generative strategies in light of new analysis and existing scholarship. This undergirds the logic of negative case analysis.

Structure of Tightening Claims Through Negative Case Analysis

Negative case analysis begins by clearly stating or writing a claim that is plausible given the data collected so far. The claim can be an intuitively emerging claim or a claim generated by one of the claim-making devices above. Then, the researcher asks, "What evidence in my data (or yet to be collected) could disprove my claim?" This question is best asked after a data immersion process, as close knowledge of the data and relevant codes can allow the researcher to answer this question much more quickly.

There are various places to look for evidence that erodes support for the claim. Is the claim true across the organization? Is the claim true for people regardless of seniority or demographic status? Is the claim true only because a set of particular circumstances that are likely to be otherwise most of the time? For causal claims, are there times when the initiating events lead to other outcomes? Is the cause actually an effect? If proposing a process or series, does the series always unfold as conceptualized? Are there moments of interruption or other factors that veer it off course? Are there demographic markers that complicate or reverse the claim?

As researchers marshal evidence against their chosen claims, a critical question emerges: "Should I throw out this claim?" Some claims are just poor accounts of what is happening in the data or the scene. There is no shame in throwing out a claim; in fact, doing so shows prudence and a willingness to be wrong. Often, our impressions of what is occurring are based on salient, close-to-mind examples from the scene, or from our own personal experiences, and those impressions do not always hold up when compared with the broader data set. Now, there is no magic number of countervailing instances that forces a claim to be rejected. If, in 450 pages of interview transcripts, one thing leads to another in all cases but one, it might still be worth articulating in the final paper while also mentioning the case when it was not true. But as more evidence mounts, the claim may simply be thrown out.

A parallel question to "What evidence in my data disproves my claim?" is the following: "What data should I pay attention to that could potentially disprove my claim?" This question obviously involves more work than simply reading through transcripts or field notes and, depending on the cycle of the study, additional data collection may or may not be feasible. That said, rigorous iterative and constant comparative research designs encourage data analysis while data collection is still happening (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tracy, 2013). Nascent claims, if they have promise for serving as the foundational arguments of the final project, can guide data collection in valuable ways. Incorporating interview questions or field foci that seek countervailing data can add rigor to the claim. If a claim survives intentional,

focused, and robust data collection and generation that seeks to undo it, it is often a very strong argument.

When thinking about how to tighten claims, parameter setting and legends of cautions can be helpful. Parameter setting involves modifying claims to better account for the data (Keyton, Bisel, & Ozley, 2009). Sometimes, researchers make claims that capture the spirit of the phenomena but are roughly stated in the beginning. By listing out the countervailing events, the researcher can tighten the descriptive scope of the argument. “A leads to B for these people or in this context.” Or, “A leads to B under these conditions.” Claims can also be tightened by creating a legend of cautions (Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2000), which involves clearly articulating the ways the researcher does *not* intend their claims and data to be taken. When engaging research around contested social issues, claims can be taken out of their context and twisted by those with oppressive agendas. Although this is ultimately unavoidable, it helps some to make claims that are resistant to misuse and to include statements of what counts as misuse.

In this case, the new claim is then clearly written out, and the researcher can reengage in negative case analysis and parameter setting—and see whether there is evidence in their data that still counters it. Negative case analysis can be used multiple times, each time forcing claims to be deeper and tighter and more fairly representative of the data and scene.

Strategic Use of Claim Tightening Through Negative Case Analysis

Some new researchers have trouble devising claims based on qualitative evidence due to a worry that their claim may be wrong. In fact, it is easy to get stuck in data analysis and become unable to move into writing the paper because of this fear. As such, practicing negative case analysis before delving into writing a final paper can provide the courage to make bold and interesting claims using other devices or intuition. As Canfield (2005) notes, “anything worth doing well is worth doing badly in the beginning” (p. 137). To make interesting and specific claims, it may be first necessary to make boring or sloppy ones. In fact, sometimes it helps to first create absurd claims and then practice negative case analysis. In doing so, often researchers can create an analytic process that is playful and creative. This playfulness limbers the researcher’s ability to make stronger claims down the line.

Example From Project With Homeless Young Adults

I had used some of the above heuristics to generate the claim “Physical presence communicates care.” So, I followed up with negative case analysis. First, I looked to the

data I had already collected. Because I was also still engaged in fieldwork at the time, I was able to attend to and actively seek out data that disproved my claim.

I found two complications with the claim as I had originally conceptualized it. First, mere physical presence did not *always* lead to the young adults reporting feeling cared for. For instance, they talked about staff who were “just there for the paycheck” or “just there clicking on their computers.” So while “being there” showed care, “just being there” did not. Upon further data collection and analysis, I was able to parse out the difference here, which ended up being an embodied enactment traceable through different nonverbal practices and acts of service. In the end, I ultimately argued that making one’s body *about* the other, as opposed to mere presence, is what gets read as compassionate.

How Claim Tightening Is Useful for Doing Research With Impact

Claim tightening increases the trustworthiness of claims made using other methods. It leads to the rejection, modification, or deepening of claims. This heuristic is especially valuable following claim generation and should be used extensively on core claims to increase the researcher’s confidence. The heuristic is expedient for doing justice-oriented work for two reasons. First, when basing policy or making strategic decisions based on research, it is important to critique claims before acting on them (Flyvbjerg, 2004a). Second, it provides an important moment for making sure claims are based not only on the researcher’s convictions but also square clearly with the breadth of experiences represented in the data.

Conclusion

In this article, we have offered a set of heuristic devices for qualitative researchers interested in and committed to research that affects society (summarized below in Table 1). By synthesizing the heuristic devices together using a common framework, we aimed to accomplish two goals. First, we believe they constitute a vibrant set of practices that can inspire context-oriented, wisdom-producing, action-inducing qualitative analysis. The heuristics used herein all contribute in some way to impact-oriented scholarship. They were not chosen at random; they serve as a tool kit, marker set, or herb garden that empower critical, interpretive, and social justice-oriented scholars to engage in excellent qualitative work.

Second, we believe that this format encourages movement between different modes of thinking. Creativity and critique use different parts of the brain and are hard to enact simultaneously (Barsade & Gibson, 2007; Fineman, 2005), but creativity and critique can be enacted more easily by

Table 1. Heuristic Devices and Their Purpose.

Heuristic device	Purpose	Outcomes
Community cocktail party	To think strategically about how communities (scholarly, practice, marginalized, and otherwise) create the context for claim making	Creates a field focus, identifies literatures, imagines logics for activist representations
Conjecturing claims	To posit possible explanations for surprising phenomena; encourages discovery through creatively by considering how various stories or pieces of the data may be interconnected	Creates possible claims to consider
Jeopardy research questions	To encourage analytic thinking that helps make claims from the data; it creates both claims and research questions, which helps establish the structure for papers and other forms of representation	Creates research questions
Phronetic claim	To offer insight into the particular situation so as to enable wise decision making in that context	Creates practical but also critical/wise tools for action and policy making
Carrying claims	To deepen claims by engaging in direct social action and using those experiences to nuance the claim	Fosters embodied insight, creates vibrant, motivating, and sensemaking claims
Tightening claims	To test claims against data, the scene, or participants so as to reject or nuance claims that do not account for what happens there	Strengthens claims

alternating through them (e.g., by first engaging in the creative process of conjecturing claims through abductive reasoning and then engaging in more critical practices such as parameter setting and negative case analysis).

We stand with the scholars and activists who argue that meaningful partnership, diverse participation, and long-term commitment enable research to contribute to social good. The way qualitative researchers think about and engage in data analysis creates challenges and opportunities for creating social action. Good qualitative analysis is generative, imaginative, revelatory, contextual, and critical. We hold that action that seeks social justice relies on generativity, imagination, revelation, context, and critique. The heuristic techniques reviewed in this article are instrumental for achieving these aims. As Johnson (2016) articulates, “I want to live in a world where our fruitful knowledge creation bears new beginnings—a world that plants seeds for new life” (p. 91). Qualitative research is well positioned to generate life-giving knowledge, and we offer these as strategies for doing so.

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