Qualitative research is associated with meanings and interpretation. It is not reliant upon numerical data as quantitative research is and focuses more upon the context in which behaviour is recorded. The reliability and validity of qualitative research has often been questioned as the analysis of its findings are often open to interpretation (Burman, 1994). Because of this it has previously been claimed that the method is not reliable or valid, although these two terms have always been defined in terms of quantitative research. It is possible that qualitative research is at least as reliable and valid as quantitative research when the definition of what is "reliable" and what is "valid" is altered to reflect the specialist nature of the qualitative method (Merrick, 1993). In quantitative terms reliability is defined as being the extent to which a particular study could be replicated and the same results achieved (Colman, 2001). Validity can be defined as the extent to which a test measures that which it claims to (Colman, 2001). Using these traditional definitions it is difficult to claim that qualitative research is either reliable or valid. This is because the main tool of the qualitative researcher is discourse analysis and the conclusions made are often open to interpretation as it is the job of the researcher to make inferences as opposed to statistics. There is often a large diversity of meanings that we can attribute to differing interpretations (Parker, 1994). This imposes the confounding variable of researcher bias, therefore reducing the validity of the analysis. It is also claimed that qualitative research lacks reliability, as due to the individualised nature of the methodology it would be difficult to repeat a study and gain exactly the same results (Merrick, 1999). It is however arguable that the quantitative definitions of reliability and validity are not appropriate measures to judge the quality of qualitative research. Qualitative research investigates issues that are too complex for quantitative analysis and does not reduce human beings to numbers and statistics (Henwood and Pigeon, 1992). Because of its unique methodology it should not be labelled as "unreliable" or "invalid" because it does not fit the criteria set for measuring the quality of numerical quantitative data. It should be judged against a criteria relevant to itself rather than that of another method (Smith, 1996). In an attempt to redefine the measure of quality in qualitative research Lincoln and Guba 1985 (cited in Merrick, 1999) suggest that the term reliability should be replaced with "credibility". This is more appropriate as it still means the data is reliable but without the strict criterion that a replica study should yield the same results. To create "credibility" there should be more than one analyst interpreting the data to reduce researcher bias and increase validity (Merrick, 1999). Wilkinson suggests there should be documentation of reflexivity where the researcher should continually record when interpretations begin to form and on what basis (Merrick, 1999). This allows the pattern of interpretation to be followed and continuous critical evaluation, therefore once again increasing validity and reducing bias. It is also suggested that interpretations should be shared with the participant to see if they agree with the conclusions drawn (Henwood and Pigeon, 1992). This is controversial however and does introduce confounding variables as the participant may publically agree with the researcher's interpretations despite privately disagreeing because they see them as holding a position of power (Smith, 1996). Also participants may disagree with negative interpretations due to social desirability bias. These are all ways to increase the reliability and validity of qualitative research without adhering to the quantitative definitions although still ensuring quality and trustworthiness of research. To further reduce researcher bias and increase validity the concept of Grounded Theory has been developed to help remove researcher bias. It suggests that theory should be built up from the observations rather than prior theory (Henwood and Pigeon, 1992). This reduces the chance of the researcher trying to fit the observations made to a prior theory, and also increases the chance that what is being measured is actually there rather than what is expected to be there (Henwood and Pigeon, 1992). There are however problems with this method as no researchers can approach an investigation without prior expectations. The terms "reliability" and "validity" as defined by quantitative methods are not fitting to qualitative research. To try and impose them onto qualitative analysis reduces the individuality and significance of the qualitative method. The studies often involve analysis of individual transcripts and because you do not get identical individuals it is unreasonable to expect the study to be repeated and identical results achieved (Merrick, 1999). This does not however mean that the research is not of high quality and trustworthy. Once measured against a criterion more fitting to the qualitative method, the quality of the research can be fully established. With validity it is possible to establish whether the researcher is actually measuring what is there by using techniques to reduce researcher bias. In conclusion Psychology is the study of the phenomena of behaviour and mental processes. An advantage of using qualitative methods is that we can study behaviour in the context of which it occurs which leads to a greater understanding to the meaning behind the behaviour (Billig, 1997). Providing measures are taken to ensure the quality and trustworthiness of the analysis of data collected, the qualitative method of studying psychology is highly valid and reliable when defined in relation to its own methodology.