

Qualitative Research

<http://qrj.sagepub.com/>

A debate about our canon

Paul Atkinson, Amanda Coffey and Sara Delamont

Qualitative Research 2001 1: 5

DOI: 10.1177/146879410100100101

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://qrj.sagepub.com/content/1/1/5>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *Qualitative Research* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://qrj.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://qrj.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations: <http://qrj.sagepub.com/content/1/1/5.refs.html>

>> [Version of Record](#) - Apr 1, 2001

[What is This?](#)

Q

R

A debate about our canon

PAUL ATKINSON, AMANDA COFFEY
AND SARA DELAMONT
University of Wales, Cardiff

Qualitative Research
Copyright © 2001
SAGE Publications
(London,
Thousand Oaks, CA
and New Delhi)
vol. 1(1): 5-21.
[1468-7941
(200104) 1:1;
5-21; 016166]

Our title comes from Behar (1995: 12) who suggested that it was time to enter into debates about the canon. She was writing specifically about and within the discipline of anthropology. Our scope is wider than that, and we intend to cover a broader range of the social sciences. But it captures a task we have set ourselves for *Qualitative Research*. As qualitative research methods achieve ever wider currency in the social and cultural disciplines, we need constantly to apply a critical and reflective gaze. We cannot afford to let qualitative research become a set of taken-for-granted precepts and procedures. Equally, we should not be so seduced by our collective success or by the radical chic of new strategies of social research as to neglect the need for methodological rigour. We see this new journal as a forum where innovations will be explored and celebrated, without in any sense deserting the more established values and disciplines.

In founding this new journal, then, we have set ourselves a number of tasks and a number of guiding principles. We shall outline some of them in this first editorial. We do not intend this to be taken as a manifesto. Our intention is to be inclusive. We do not seek to impose our own perspectives on the entire field. Rather, we seek to map out the sort of terrain we hope our authors will cover, and the sort of papers we hope to publish as the journal develops in the years ahead. The task is not to defend canonical readings of the past, or to prescribe a new canon for the future. Rather, we want to encourage a critical engagement with the orthodox and the heterodox, the familiar and the innovative, the modern and the postmodern, the experimental and the traditional. In this inaugural editorial, therefore, we do a number of things. We outline the scope of 'qualitative research' as it applies to this new journal. We locate the journal in the traditions of qualitative research. We outline the journal's *raison d'être*. We introduce the contents of this first issue. We extend an invitation to potential contributors to *Qualitative Research*.

Qualitative Research

We are working with a broad definition of qualitative research. The breadth of our intended coverage extends across four dimensions: of discipline; of method; of topic and substance; of voices and texts.

DISCIPLINE

Qualitative research is predominant in social and cultural anthropology. We have distinguished anthropologists on the editorial board and welcome contributions by and about anthropologists. Social anthropology in the UK and cultural anthropology in the USA and the continental European traditions of anthropology have grown up with slightly different 'takes' on method and empirical focus: we want to include the best from all traditions. Qualitative research also has a long history in sociology and social policy with studies from slums in the late nineteenth century through to investigations of mushroom hunters and body builders by sociologists and of the underclass by social policy researchers today. We have scholars in these disciplines on our board, and we welcome papers from sociologists and qualitative policy researchers. Sociological researchers have always used qualitative methods to produce analyses deploying diverse theoretical perspectives, and we wish to carry sociological papers representative of that theoretical diversity. Geography has a great tradition of qualitative research, which we hope to share with interested readers in the other disciplines. Qualitative methods are by comparison rare in psychology, economics, and political science, but we shall welcome informed discussions of them (e.g. Bengston, 1991). Indeed, we would especially welcome the chance to promote the exploration of qualitative research in fields that are too often associated with a restricted methodological vision.

It is singularly unhelpful to all concerned if disciplines become tightly classified and circumscribed according to styles of research. It is too easy to assume that disciplines like economics or psychology are exclusively characterized by quantification and positivist epistemologies. But discursive and narrative psychological work is becoming increasingly visible, while at least some researchers in economics, business and management fields find themselves using and endorsing qualitative strategies. Discursive research brings into close proximity psychology, sociology, anthropology and linguistics. The linguistic turn creates new disciplinary alliances and influences. We would wish to see them reflected in the contents of *Qualitative Research*. Increasingly, of course, cultural scholarship simultaneously extends and blurs the boundaries of qualitative research. The social sciences and the humanities find common ground in the close analysis of mass media, popular culture, music and the arts, and textual representations of all sorts (Ashmore, 1989). At the same time, social and cultural analysts themselves are exploring and developing their own literary and visual modes of

representation. We seek to embrace work from these emergent genres, and to provide a forum for their discussion. New ethnography and alternative literary forms will find their place here alongside more conventional papers. While we do not seek to preserve arbitrary disciplinary boundaries, or to hold back the rising tide of interdisciplinary work, we are committed to maintaining the importance of disciplinary knowledge: we do not believe that qualitative research constitutes a substitute for discipline, or that it constitutes a research paradigm in and of itself.

METHOD

In terms of methodologies, perspectives and strategies, qualitative research is an umbrella term which encompasses many approaches. Our own research remains grounded in the virtues of conventional ethnography, with a commitment to participant observation (Atkinson et al., 1999), although we have explored more innovative approaches as well (e.g. Coffey, 1999). We are personally committed to multiple strategies of data collection and analysis within a broadly ethnographic approach. Qualitative research is broader than that, however. *Qualitative Research* will welcome contributions that use, discuss and evaluate the entire range of qualitative work. We shall seek to publish papers on all types of qualitative interviewing (oral and life history, personal narrative, group interviews, focus groups). Likewise, we welcome studies of documentary reality and research using all forms of audio and audio-visual recordings. As we have already indicated, we recognize the significance of the linguistic turn and will seek to include papers that draw on and reflect upon discourse, conversational and textual analyses, from a variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives.

We recognize the increasing significance of reflective, autobiographical texts in these traditions (Reed-Danahay, 1997; Stanley, 1992). Auto-ethnography – in all its current senses – will, we hope, be explored in the pages of *Qualitative Research*. Just as the disciplinary boundaries have become weakened, so too have the distinctions between self and other, researcher and researched, stranger and friend, distant and near. Just as the disciplinary canons need constant review, so too do the systems of difference that sustain those disciplinary traditions.

Within the limits of conventional publication conventions, we would also like to recognize the growing number of practitioners of dramaturgical and other performative methods of data collection and representation. We do not do so merely in order to endorse the currently fashionable. Rather, we recognize that performative ethnography can mirror and evoke the performative nature of everyday life. Indeed, it makes little sense for us to document the dramaturgical skills of ordinary social actors while denying ourselves the dramatic and performative resources through which we can explore and realize those forms of action.

TOPIC AND SUBSTANCE

Qualitative methods have been used to investigate a diverse array of topics in social settings of all sorts. In anthropology, the earliest interest in exotic peoples of overseas possessions and internal colonies has been supplemented by a more extensive and inclusive subject-matter (Geertz, 1973, 1983). The distinction between the 'elsewhere' of the anthropologist and the sociologist's interest in the near-at-hand has become virtually meaningless (Messerschmidt, 1981). Indeed, there is far greater congruence between anthropological and sociological ethnography than there is between the latter and the kind of sociology that is closer to demography, applied economics and applied social statistics. It is too late to effect an institutional rapprochement between the ethnographers and other qualitative researchers across the departmental divide, but in the pages of this journal practitioners of both traditions will be equally welcome. In sociology, the earliest research was on urban settings with particular reference to the poor, and in the USA to members of a large number of ethnic communities and cultures. Rural settings and the intermediate locations of small towns and suburbs followed. In the past 50 years, social organizations and institutions, as well as informal groups and associations of all sorts have been the subject of field research. All age groups from small children to the frail elderly have been studied, as have the members of a remarkable array of occupations, faiths, interest groups and ethnic communities. Some authors doing exemplary qualitative research are less well known than they should be because they have been publishing in journals focused on just one empirical area. We hope to attract papers from specialized fields – whether they be science and technology, education, health and medicine, sport and leisure, art and culture – which are of interest to qualitative researchers working in other fields. In the past 20 years, qualitative research on specific settings, such as health, nursing and education, has grown so much that these fields constitute the largest communities of practitioners of qualitative research (Delamont and Atkinson, 1995). It is remarkable how qualitative research strategies have been adopted in contexts of applied social research, beyond the confines of the narrow disciplines and fundamental research. Those specialized fields have their own journals of qualitative research. We hope that *Qualitative Research* will complement those journals by disseminating such research to even wider audiences.

TEXTS AND VOICES

Qualitative researchers have always reported, and often celebrated, many voices: of the dispossessed, the inarticulate, the outcast, the powerless *and* the wealthy, the smooth-tongued, the influential, the powerful. It is one of the abiding strengths of the qualitative traditions that we are attentive to the life-worlds and voices of individuals and social groups that reflect the heterogeneity of social life. Qualitative research incorporates the voices of

social actors through narratives, life-histories, diaries and other documents of life. The 'interview' and the biographical account are pervasive in contemporary society and in social research (cf. Atkinson and Silverman, 1997). We shall welcome papers based on such inquiry and papers that provide a commentary on the collection and representation of such biographical and textual materials.

Introspective and critical reflections on how such voices should be articulated have been prominent since 1986 (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; James et al., 1997), though they are not new. Qualitative researchers of all persuasions have become acutely self-conscious about their own authorial styles and voices. The rhetorical and textual conventions of scholarly authorship have been increasingly treated as problematic (Handler, 1983). The historical and stylistic continuities with so-called realist fiction have been well documented (Atkinson, 1992; Cappetti, 1993; Krieger, 1983, 1984). Literary realism has been identified as the dominant mode of representation, implying an impersonal, all-but invisible-narrator (Van Maanen, 1988). It is presented from the point of view of one impartial author. His or her point of view is the dominant, even the sole, one. It is a genre of authoritative reportage. As a style, as a collection of literary devices, such realist writing is a massively familiar one for the construction of factual authoritative accounts. There is, therefore, the danger of taking it for granted and hence of treating it as a natural way of representing the social. Despite this tendency towards a realist approach, it remains by no means clear that literary realism is the only – or even the best – way to produce accounts of varied social worlds. Indeed, as Atkinson (1983) noted, there is something of a paradox in the use of what one might call a 'straightforward' realism for ethnographic purposes. There is a tension between the conventions of realism and the assumption of most ethnographic work. For most ethnographers – whether sociology or anthropology is their primary discipline – recognize the complexity of social life and its collective representations.

Contemporary debates over the ethnographic representation of cultural phenomena have concentrated on the textual construction of reality (Atkinson, 1990, 1996). Emerging most starkly within the discipline of anthropology, such debates have spread to sociology and the ethnographic endeavour more generally. At the centre of such debates is the critical appraisal of ethnographic writing and the social production of the ethnographic text. Traditionally, the professional and academic status passage has been completed and confirmed by the construction of a major text. The anthropological monograph, therefore, was the culmination of the ethnography and the legitimating mark of the anthropologist (see Coffey and Atkinson, 1996 for UK data on the continuing significance of 'fieldwork'). The relationships between fieldwork, text production and the discipline of anthropology, have then developed over time. The anthropologist was identified with his or her 'people'. In turn, the people were identified with,

and in, the ethnography: particular cultures and groups became knowable through the texts that captured them in standard monographs and conventional rhetorical formats. The ethnographic monograph thus became the embodiment of the discipline itself and the academic identity of its authors. Within the classical period of British and American anthropology the ethnographic monograph enshrined a series of standardized representations of societies and (by implication) of their authors (Boon, 1982; Fabian, 1983). There are, of course, other modes of ethnographic representation, including film. They are as conventional and artful as any written text (Crawford and Turton, 1992; Loizos, 1993).

Given the importance of the ethnography as textual product, it is little wonder that radical assaults on its status should strike at the roots of the discipline. Thus in recent years, anthropology – once so stable – has experienced a ‘crisis of representation’. The textual foundations have been shaken and, along with them, the intellectual faith that has informed their production and reception (Denuvo, 1992). The status of ethnographic texts has also come under scrutiny from within sociology (Atkinson, 1990, 1992; Hammersley, 1992). In many ways this has proved a less critical issue for sociology than for anthropology, not least because ethnographic methods and monographs are much less central to sociology as a whole. Important though qualitative research is in many fields of empirical sociology, it does not underpin the entire academic enterprise as it does for anthropology. The critiques of ethnography in sociology have sometimes followed directions similar to those in anthropology (see Hastrup, 1992; Richardson, 1994). Several of the positions from which such critiques derive have been associated with the general thrust of postmodernism. Postmodernism in general has certainly contributed to reappraisals of cultural representation in the human sciences and beyond. It should also be acknowledged that recent developments are not dependent on postmodernism *per se*.

As we have argued elsewhere, we are not at all convinced that all the claims made for and about ‘postmodernism’ and methodology are justified. We do not seek to defend a so-called modernist, empiricist or scientific version of social research. We do not reject the approaches often attributed to the postmodern turn in our disciplines, nor do we wholeheartedly endorse self-proclaimed postmodernists’ justifications and arguments. We do not think that ethnographic, qualitative research was ever modernist or empiricist in the way that is sometimes suggested. Contemporary advocates of postmodernist and other radical approaches to social research can all too readily convey the idea that all social researchers before the very recent past were all equally in thrall to a scientific or positivist approach to social research. As we have argued elsewhere, however, this is a gross oversimplification (see Atkinson et al., 1999; Delamont et al., 2000) and does less than justice to scholars of previous generations. The practitioners of Chicago sociology (Rock, 1979), social and cultural anthropology, life-history

research or community studies were often, we are quite convinced, committed to a view of social research that was quite different from the 'positivist' models of their contemporaries who were totally persuaded by the supposed virtues of quantification, experimentation and the appearances of 'science'. Our predecessors – those we respect at any rate – were not so easily fooled. They were certainly committed to the core values of rational inquiry, methodical research and scholarly writing. But they knew too that their work stood at the intersection of social 'science' and humanistic inquiry. They knew, even if they did not always acknowledge it explicitly, that cultural relativism in sociological or anthropological analysis must apply in part to their own activities. It did not escape all of them that theirs was an interpretative undertaking, dependent on human imagination as well as factual data (Babcock, 1995). They knew that their knowledge-claims rested on their own engagement with particular social worlds, and their transactions with their hosts or informants. They did not think that research methods furnished impersonal, de-contextualized warrants of knowledge, nor that their work of translation from one cultural frame to another was independent of their own personal knowledge. Such research was always poised between the sciences and the cultural disciplines, reflecting literary and humane sensibilities.

Our vision for Qualitative Research

In laying out our stall for qualitative research in general and *Qualitative Research* in particular, we do not, therefore, think that is helpful to attribute contemporary interests and developments entirely to the influence of postmodernism. We equally find it unhelpful to erect symbolic boundaries between the past and the present. Many contemporary scholars retain a commitment to the methods and theories of their mentors, while previous generations were not – as we have suggested – unmindful of the reflexive foundations of social inquiry.

Equally, we find unhelpful the preservation of tight symbolic membranes between different approaches to qualitative research. We do not believe that qualitative research – ethnographic, narrative, visual, textual – should be constrained within the straitjackets of so-called paradigms or traditions. Qualitative research certainly has important affinities with disciplinary orientations, with theoretical movements, and with epistemological standpoints. But it is foolish to try to read off specific methods of data collection or strategies of analysis from specific theoretical orientations. Likewise, it is singularly unproductive to constrain the complexities of social inquiry within the bounds of narrowly sectarian theory.

'Orthodoxy' in ethnographic research is not a stable category. On the contrary, the lasting vigour of ethnographic research owes much to its diversity of methodological and representational standpoints. The postmodern

turn in ethnography, and in the social sciences more generally, has inspired many commentators to identify and to explore a varied range of ways to report and represent the social or the cultural. We shall explore some aspects of this diversity and their consequences in *Qualitative Research*. We do not, however, believe that it is necessary to invoke the rhetoric of postmodern inquiry in order to take these issues seriously. Although the postmodernist turn has often provided the inspiration, earlier – more classical – versions of sociological or anthropological understanding furnish justifications for the exploration of ethnographic representation. In other words, there is no need to appeal to ‘postmodernism’ per se to account for the diversity that characterizes the ethnographic enterprise. We believe that tensions are integral to ethnography. The processes of cultural translation do not traverse only the cultural boundaries of the ethnographer and her or his subject-matter. Ethnography is also shot through with cultural differences (Clifford, 1988). The tensions and differences that we explore are inherent to the development and promotion of ethnographic research.

Current perspectives on ethnographic and cultural research can be characterized in terms of variety. The methodological domain is marked by a clamour of styles and justifications. Not only is there diversity, there are also subversive and transgressive tendencies. We cannot only think in terms of contrast and complementarity in research methods and strategies: we must also think in terms of contested approaches to social and cultural research. Contemporary ethnography certainly cannot be seen as an unproblematic set of procedures for data collection (Emerson et al., 1995; Sanjek, 1990). Indeed, it cannot be seen as a purely methodological category. The ethnographic enterprise now carries with it connotations of theoretical, epistemological and ethical controversy. Contemporary diversity is not, however, a recent offshoot from a previously uniform research culture. It is not the case that a homogeneous ‘modern’ ethnography has had to await the rise of fashionable postmodernity. Postmodernity has undoubtedly amplified certain differences, but has not supplanted a unified stream of research methodology. It has given renewed prominence to particular lines of cleavage and granted legitimacy to particular factional claims. It has helped to rationalize the avant-garde in social research. It would be wrong, however, to assume that the presence of an avant-garde is an entirely recent phenomenon or entirely dependent on appeals to the postmodern.

Qualitative Research will be eclectic: good papers couched in traditional forms and in radical styles will be published. Various commentators have called for texts that are more open, messy and fragmented in order to do at least two things: firstly to challenge and highlight the very conventionality of such ethnographic writing and secondly to allow for more creative and complex modes of representation (cf. Bluebond-Langer, 1980; Mulkay, 1985). Further, therefore, while the conventionality of all modes of representation is recognized, there is more than a hint in such arguments

that complex texts may be more faithful to the complexities and contours of social life. We have discussed some of these alternative forms of representation elsewhere (Atkinson and Coffey, 1995; Coffey and Atkinson, 1996) and so will not recapitulate these discussions here. The sorts of alternative representational modes we have in mind include: a dialogic approach (Allan, 1994; Dwyer, 1977, 1979; Holquist, 1990); ethno-drama or ethno-theatre (Ellis and Bochner, 1992; Paget, 1990); and poetry (Richardson, 1992). These approaches are in turn closely related to the promotion of biographical and autobiographical work in anthropology and sociology: in particular, on the 'writing' of lives and selves (Hastrup, 1992; Stanley, 1992). (See Ellis and Bochner, 1996 and Ely et al., 1997 for a recent collection of papers and a recent overview respectively.)

Feminist theory and praxis have also questioned the thus far privileged position of observer–author. Here the argument has not been about the over- or under-representation of men and women as ethnographic authors, but rather about the relationships between feminism, gender and ethnography at more fundamental levels. Clough (1992), for instance, articulates a feminist view, drawing on psychoanalytic perspectives. She argues that from a feminist standpoint one can see the standard realist accounts of ethnography as incorporating unconscious fantasies and desires concerning race, gender or class. Realism, she argues, suppresses those unconscious processes under the guise of factual discourse. Wolf (1992) also addresses the feminist perspective on ethnography and representation. She suggests that reflexive, self-critical attitudes are particularly characteristic of feminist thought. Feminism in general encourages an examination of power and powerlessness, the mutual obligations of researcher and researched. She implies that feminist scholars were exploring these issues independently of their becoming fashionable topics among male anthropologists. As Wolf also suggests, the heightened sensibilities of feminist scholars have led directly towards problems of representation. In a similar vein, Mascia-Lees et al. (1989) draw attention to a concern among feminist anthropologists for modes of understanding (including writing) that do not reduce women to the position of voiceless *objects*, but treat them as subjects in their own right, entitled to their own voices. This echoes the very foundations of the feminist research process – the concern with voice and authority, accounts and experience (Hernandez, 1995; Olesen, 1994; Smith, 1987). The feminist strain of ethnographic critique is reminiscent of the distinction, first elaborated by Shirley and Edwin Ardener (e.g. Ardener, 1975), between dominant and muted groups. This view proposes that there are fractions of the population whose culture, or world-view, is dominant (e.g. men; upper classes; dominant ethnic groups). There are others, the dominated (e.g. women; lower class; suppressed minorities) who are 'muted' in that they are deprived of their own culturally legitimated means of expression. Muted groups are seen – and must often see themselves – through the categories of

the dominant. They are visible and audible only through the eyes or voices of the dominating groups. As a consequence, they cease to be the subjects of their own experiences and actions; they are reduced to being the objects of other subjects. They are subjugated in that sense. It is argued, therefore, by feminists and other critics of classic ethnographic discourse that the 'others' of such inquiry and such description are rendered mute (Lather, 1991). Indeed, when the objects of ethnography are already dominated (as are women, for instance) the ethnographic gaze may be in danger of performing a kind of double subjugation.

Qualitative Research will be an outlet for, but will not be dominated by, two current orthodoxies around analysis. An emerging orthodoxy is being adopted globally by key members of the qualitative research community. This is frequently, but not exclusively, linked to versions of 'grounded theory' (Charmaz, 1983; Glaser, 1978; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1994). This in turn is itself a site for the interplay between competing intellectual cultures. Again, it is not our purpose here to review the different interpretations and uses of grounded theory, nor to rehearse the particularities of the dispute between its progenitors. Rather, we use it once more to illustrate the essential tensions within the broad intellectual field of ethnographic research, and the work of cultural interpretation. (The varieties and ambiguities of the interpretation surrounding such methodological ideas need more thorough exploration than we can do justice to here.)

Grounded theorizing has been received in two ways – sometimes quite starkly contrasted. On the one hand, it may be read in terms of a general strategy of social inquiry – only loosely tied to any particular 'method' of data collection and analysis. Its ideas reflect a broadly pragmatist philosophy of science (Strauss and Corbin, 1994). It represents research as a process of transactions with the natural or social world, it stresses the practical nature of inquiry, and it supposes that truth is 'enacted'. The methodological precepts outlined by Glaser and Strauss in their original publication are therefore seen as strategic and heuristic. They provide generalized descriptions and guidelines concerning the researcher's engagement with the world under investigation, her or his data, and ideas or theories. It is a quite explicit rejection of a positivist epistemology, and in its original form, it resists translation into simple formulae and prescriptions. That reading of grounded theory has not prevailed in all contexts. On the contrary, a great deal of empirical work, and secondary methodological writing, have translated it into 'a method' that can be reduced to prescriptive recipe-knowledge. The methodological literature to which Strauss himself contributed helped to construct that reading to some extent. The process of simplification that is attendant on the production of text-book versions of an oral tradition created versions of method that translated heuristic principles into prescriptive formulae.

This is partly linked to the growth of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) as a sub-field of expertise (Lee and Fielding, 1991). Software packages aimed at analysing qualitative data are now widespread and it is a fast growing field. We do not intend to review all of that literature, or all of the existing software. That has been done elsewhere (Burgess, 1995; Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Coffey et al., 1996; Fisher, 1997; Tesch, 1990; Weaver and Atkinson, 1994, 1995; Weitzman and Miles, 1994). We note in particular the convergence of most computer applications on a general model of data marking and retrieval. Many of the software packages may most accurately be described as computer-based applications for the storage and retrieval of data. While there are additional facilities and sophistication involved, the general notion of coding remains fundamental to such CAQDAS. Grounded theorizing is more than coding, and software can be used to do more than code-and-retrieve textual data. The point here is not about the full potential of CAQDAS, nor about the true nature of grounded theorizing. Rather, the danger lies in the glib association between the two, linked by an emphasis on data coding procedures.

It is too easy for there to develop a taken-for-granted mode of data handling. This is not necessarily an inherent feature of software itself: it resides in the uses to which such software is put. In our view, the association of CAQDAS with an over-simplified 'grounded theory' justification can be misleading to students and researchers to whom it is introduced. CAQDAS offers a variety of useful ways of organizing data in order to search them, but coding data for use with computer programs is not analysis. It is important to avoid the misapprehension that coding and computing lend a scientific gloss to qualitative research. The growing 'respectability' of qualitative methods, together with an adherence to canons of rigour associated primarily with other research traditions, can lead to the imposition of spurious standards (Fielding and Lee, 1995). The categorization of textual data and the use of computer software to search for them appear to render the general approach akin to standardized survey or experimental design procedures. In our view, qualitative research is not enhanced by poor imitations of other research styles and traditions. Analytic procedures which appear rooted in standardized, often mechanistic procedures are no substitute for genuinely 'grounded' engagement with the data throughout the whole of the research process. It is worth noting that the 'usefulness' of such computer programmes implies that you have collected and input all your data, and this suggests that data collection and data analysis are discrete and linear.

We shall seek to publish papers that reflect on and disseminate the latest developments in computing applications for qualitative research. We hope that such a stream of papers in our journal will go beyond the past styles of CAQDAS. We believe that we are only just beginning to witness the impact of information technology on qualitative research. The most recent developments in software start to point the way forward, integrating as they do data

of different types and permitting an integrated presentation of multiple media. It undoubtedly goes beyond the provision of software for data management, even for theory-building. Information technology furnishes us simultaneously with new social phenomena to study and new resources through which we can engage with them. Recent years have seen new departures in the study of cybersociety and cyberculture. Information technology will give us vastly expanded ways of representing social phenomena – the new processes and domains of cybersociety, and the more traditional subject-matter of ethnographic exploration. We hope that our colleagues will explore these emergent phenomena in the pages of *Qualitative Research* by reporting on methodological innovation and publishing new empirical research.

This issue

This first issue of the new journal reflects many of the commitments we have identified in the preceding paragraphs. Its contents are truly international in origin. We have included articles from the USA, the UK and Australia. These articles also reflect our commitment to disciplinary diversity. Hammersley and Denzin are sociologists, while Reed-Danahay is an anthropologist. Moreover, they reflect very different kinds of intellectual perspective. Hammersley is well known for his commitment to ‘mainstream’ ethnographic research and its representation. He has consistently argued from a methodologically sophisticated realist standpoint. His discussion of research ethics provides a re-evaluation of a long-standing set of preoccupations among the research community. The article is part of Hammersley’s project of evaluating claims concerning bias and partisanship in social research. He is sceptical of many of the positions currently adopted by many influential researchers and commentators. Norman Denzin, by contrast, espouses a view of research and its representation that can be glossed as more postmodern in content and style. In this article, Denzin proposes a radical reappraisal of the interview in social research. When so much qualitative research is currently based on individual and group interviews, it is vitally important that we address the nature of those research encounters. We are delighted to include in our first number two articles from those different standpoints.

Pamela Cawthorne’s article reports on the experiences of interview-based fieldwork in India and elsewhere. It is grounded in her experiences studying garment workers in South India. Her concerns with macro-economics, globalized production and consumption systems, and with Marxist theoretical debates lead to her reflections on research techniques and their philosophical base. We do not intend to confine the contents of *Qualitative Research* only to methodological and epistemological reflections. We are, therefore, very happy to be including Deborah Reed-Danahay’s article, in

which she reports and reflects upon recent field research. Her discussion of the analysis of time and space is an especially elegant one. Reed-Danahay epitomizes the mission of the journal. She had previously done research in rural France (Reed-Danahay, 1996), and here she reports a study of residential care settings for Americans with Alzheimer's. A shift of country and empirical focus has been made, but the methodological techniques are essentially similar. Using theoretical ideas from French scholars, including Pierre Bourdieu, her anthropology at home relates also to sociologists such as Gubrium. Her research itself thus ranges over disciplinary and national boundaries. Finally, we are glad to include a review essay and a strong book reviews section. We are especially committed to the reviewing function of *Qualitative Research*. While the volume of publications continues to grow, many of the methodological and empirical books remain relatively invisible in many journals. We believe that a reviews section, including major review essays and review symposia, is one of the most valuable services we can provide for our constituency of authors and subscribers. We shall encourage publishers to provide us with review copies, and authors to encourage publishers to do so.

An invitation

We are, to take two phrases from Lichtenstein and Sinclair (1999: 62, 321) 'thirsty for stories' which are 'both moving and informative'. Lichtenstein and Sinclair, an artist and a novelist, are recording their search for the 'truth' about the fate of David Rodinsky who vanished from London's Whitechapel in 1963. They find all sorts of possible truths – about Rodinsky's room and a great many other things too. We want to publish the work of scholars writing from diverse perspectives. We want to include papers that are primarily methodological and we want to publish papers that report empirical qualitative research. We shall also welcome theoretical and epistemological papers that reflect upon and contribute to the broad themes of qualitative research. As we have indicated already, we embrace not only diverse subject-matter, but also diverse styles of writing and reportage.

As we have tried to indicate, we are not committed to the promotion of sectarian allegiances within the broad domain of qualitative research in this journal. Our own perspectives will find expression in our own publications elsewhere. We are committed to fostering informed discussion and debate about the development of qualitative research across the disciplines and in their application across empirical domains. Our concern is for the disciplined exploration of the theoretical, methodological and practical underpinnings of research. We wish to encourage the investigation and exemplification of traditional and innovatory ways to write and represent the processes and products of qualitative research. We shall be delighted to include accounts of the research process from a personal perspective, as well as

more general reflections on the state of the art. We shall seek to involve less experienced colleagues as well as established figures. We invite our colleagues to accept this general invitation to contribute to such a programme of publication.

Andrew Abbott's (1999) history of *The American Journal of Sociology*, celebrating the journal's centenary in 1995, suggests that journal articles are becoming more homogenized, while leading scholars largely shun peer reviewed journals, preferring to publish books instead. Journals are, Abbott proposes, becoming increasingly routine and bureaucratized, concentrating on the publication of safe 'normal science'. New ideas and paradigm-changing work demand new outlets, therefore. The general thrust of Abbott's analysis is depressing. We have no intention of letting *Qualitative Research* become so stultifying as the publications Abbott castigates. Other cynical observers suggest that the exponential growth in academic journals merely serves the career needs and the vanity of their authors. It is not our intention merely to add to the volume of run-of-the-mill journals. Certainly we have no personal need for self-promotion through the labour of starting and editing a journal. We do not expect our authors to be publishing with us only for extrinsic rewards. We do intend to publish work that helps to transform the conduct and content of social science research across a wide range of disciplines and specialized fields.

REFERENCES

- Abbott, A. (1999) *Department and Discipline: Chicago Sociology at One Hundred*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Allan S. (1994) "'When Discourse is Torn from Reality": Bakhtin and the Principle of Chronologoplicity', *Time and Society* 3(2): 193–218.
- Ardener, S. (ed.) (1975) *Perceiving Women*. London: Dent.
- Ashmore, M. (1989) *The Reflexive Thesis: Writing Sociology of Scientific Knowledge*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Atkinson, P. (1983) 'Writing Ethnography', in H.J. Helle (ed.) *Kultur und Institution*, pp. 77–105. Berlin: Ducker und Humblot.
- Atkinson, P. (1990) *The Ethnographic Imagination*. London: Routledge.
- Atkinson, P. (1992) *Understanding Ethnographic Texts*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Atkinson, P. (1996) *Sociological Readings and Re-readings*. Aldershot: Avebury.
- Atkinson, P. and Coffey, A. (1995) 'Realism and its Discontents: The Crisis of Cultural Representation in Ethnographic Texts', in B. Adam and S. Allen (eds) *Theorising Culture*, pp. 103–39. London: UCL Press.
- Atkinson, P., Coffey, A. and Delamont, S. (1999) 'Ethnography: Post, Past and Present', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 28(5): 460–71.
- Atkinson, P. and Silverman, D. (1997) 'Kundera's *Immortality*: The Interview Society and the Invention of the Self', *Qualitative Inquiry* 3(3): 304–25.
- Babcock, B.A. (1995) 'Not in the Absolute Singular: Re-reading Ruth Benedict', in R. Behar and D. Gordon (eds) *Women Writing Culture*, pp. 104–30. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Behar, R. (1995) 'Introduction: Out of Exile', in R. Behar and D.A. Gordon (eds) *Women Writing Culture*, pp. 1–29. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Bengston, J.K. (1991) 'Poetic Rigor for a Toughminded Psychology', *Qualitative Studies in Education* 4(4): 341–59.
- Bluebond-Langer, M. (1980) *The Private Worlds of Dying Children*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Boon, J.A. (1982) *Other Tribes, Other Scribes: Symbolic Anthropology in the Comparative Study of Authors, Histories, Religions and Texts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Burgess, R.G. (ed.) (1995) *Computing and Qualitative Research: Studies in Qualitative Methodology* 5. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Cappetti, C. (1993) *Writing Chicago*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Charmaz, K. (1983) 'The Grounded Theory Method: An Explication and Interpretation', in R. Emerson (ed.) *Contemporary Field Research*, pp. 109–26. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Clifford, J. (1988) *The Predicament of Culture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Clifford, J. and Marcus, G.E. (eds) (1986) *Writing Culture*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Clough, P. (1992) *The End(s) of Ethnography*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Coffey, A. (1999) *The Ethnographic Self*. London: Sage.
- Coffey, A. and Atkinson, P. (1996) *Making Sense of Qualitative Data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Coffey, A., Holbrook, B. and Atkinson, P. (1996) 'Qualitative Data Analysis: Technologies and Representations', *Sociological Research Online* 1: <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/1/1/4.html>
- Crawford, P.I. and Turton, D. (eds) (1992) *Film as Ethnography*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Delamont, S. and Atkinson, P. (1995) *Fighting Familiarity*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Delamont, S., Coffey, A. and Atkinson, P. (2000) The Twilight Years? Educational Ethnography and the Five Moments Model, *Qualitative Studies in Education* 13(3): 223–38.
- Denuvo, R. (1992) 'No Anthro-Apologies, or Der(r)id(a) a Discipline', in R.H. Brown (ed.) *Writing the Social Text: Poetics and Politics in Social Science Discourse*. New York: de Gruyter.
- Denzin, N. (1997) *Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices for the 21st Century*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dwyer, K. (1977) 'On the Dialogic of Fieldwork', *Dialectical Anthropology* 2(2): 143–51.
- Dwyer, K. (1979) 'The Dialogic of Ethnology', *Dialectical Anthropology* 4(4): 205–24.
- Edmondson, R. (1984) *Rhetoric in Sociology*. London: Macmillan.
- Ellis, C. and Bochner, A. (1992) 'Telling and Performing Personal Stories: The Constraints of Choice in Abortion', in C. Ellis and M.G. Flaherty (eds) *Investigating Subjectivity: Research on Lived Experience*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Ellis, C. and Bochner, A. (eds) (1996) *Composing Ethnography: Alternative Forms of Qualitative Writing*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira.
- Ely, M., Vinz, R., Downing, M. and Anzul, M. (1997) *On Writing Qualitative Research: Living by Words*. London: Falmer.
- Emerson, R.M., Fretz R.L. and Strauss, L.L. (1995) *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Fabian, J. (1983) *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Subject*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Fielding, N.G. and Lee, R.M. (1995) 'Confronting CAQDAS: Choice and Contingency', in R.G. Burgess (ed.) *Computing and Qualitative Research: Studies in Qualitative Methodology* 5. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Fisher, M. (1997) *Qualitative Computing: Using Software for Qualitative Data Analysis*. Aldershot: Avebury.
- Geertz, C. (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Geertz, C. (1983) *Local Knowledge*. New York: Basic Books.
- Glaser, B. (1978) *Theoretical Sensitivity*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociological Press.
- Glaser, B. and Strauss, A.L. (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Hammersley, M. (1992) *What's Wrong with Ethnography?* London: Routledge.
- Handler, R. (1983) 'The Dainty and the Hungry Man: Literature and Anthropology in the Work of Edward Sapir', in G. Stocking (ed.) *Observers Observed*, pp. 201–31. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Hastrup, K. (1992) 'Writing Ethnography: State of the Art', in J. Okely and H. Callaway (eds) *Anthropology and Autobiography*. London: Routledge.
- Hernandez, G. (1995) 'Multiple Subjectivities and Strategic Positionality', in R. Behar and D. Gordon (eds) *Women Writing Culture*, pp. 148–66. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Holquist, M. (1990) *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World*. London: Routledge.
- James, A., Hockey, J. and Dawson, A. (eds) (1997) *After Writing Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Krieger, S. (1983) *The Mirror Dance: Identity in a Women's Community*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Krieger, S. (1984) 'Fiction and Social Science', in N.K. Denzin (ed.) *Studies in Symbolic Interaction* 5: pp. 269–86. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Lather, P. (1991) *Getting Smart: Feminist Research with/in the Postmodern*. London: Routledge.
- Lee, R.M. and Fielding, N.G. (1991) 'Computing for Qualitative Research: Options, Problems and Potential', in N.G. Fielding and R.M. Lee (eds) *Using Computers in Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.
- Lichtenstein, R. and Sinclair, I. (1999) *Rodinsky's Room*. London: Granta Books.
- Loizos, P. (1993) *Innovation in Ethnographic Film: From Innocence to Self-Consciousness*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Mascia-Lees, F.E., Sharpe, P. and Cohen, C.B. (1989) 'The Postmodernist Turn in Anthropology: Cautions from a Feminist Perspective', *Signs* 15(1): 7–23.
- Meloy, J.M. (1993) 'Problems of Writing and Representation in Qualitative Inquiry', *Qualitative Studies in Education* 6(4): 315–30.
- Messerschmidt, D. (ed.) (1981) *Anthropologists at Home in North America: Methods and Issues in the Study of One's Own Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mulkay, M. (1985) *The Word and the World*. London: Allen and Unwin.
- Olesen, V. (1994) 'Feminism and Models of Qualitative Research' in N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (eds) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Paget, M. (1990) 'Performing the Text', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 19(1): 136–55.
- Reed-Danahay, D. (1996) *Education and Identity in Rural France: The Politics of Schooling*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Reed-Danahay, D. (ed.) (1997) *Auto/Ethnography*. Oxford: Berg.
- Richardson, L. (1992) 'The Consequences of Poetic Representation: Writing the Other, Rewriting the Self', in C. Ellis and M.G. Flaherty (eds) *Investigating Subjectivity: Research on Lived Experience*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

- Richardson, L. (1994) 'Writing as a Method of Inquiry', in N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (eds) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rock, P. (1979) *The Making of Symbolic Interactionism*. London: Macmillan.
- Sanjek, R. (ed.) (1990) *Fieldnotes: The Making of Anthropology*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Smith, D.E. (1987) *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*. Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press.
- Stanley, L. (1992) *The Auto/Biographical I: Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/Biography*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Strauss, A. L. and Corbin, J. (1990) *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory, Procedures and Techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Strauss, A. L. and Corbin, J. (1994) 'Grounded Theory Methodology: An Overview', in N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (eds) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Tesch, R. (1990) *Qualitative Research*. London: Falmer.
- Van Maanen, J.J. (1988) *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Weaver, A. and Atkinson, P. (1994) *Microcomputing and Qualitative Data Analysis*. Aldershot: Avebury.
- Weaver, A. and Atkinson, P. (1995) 'From Coding to Hypertext', in R.G. Burgess (ed.) *Computing and Qualitative Research: Studies in Qualitative Methodology* 5: pp. 141–68. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Weitzman, E.A. and Miles, M.B. (1994) *Computer Programs for Qualitative Analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Wolf, M. (1992) *The Thrice Told Tale: Feminism, Postmodernism and Ethnographic Responsibility*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.