



Editorial

I'm delighted to introduce the complete set of articles of our 2023 volume. It is a "bumper volume" now comprising no less than 15 articles!

The **quality of qualitative research** needs to be demonstrated and championed, i.e., argued for, but how? Quantitative criteria based on scientific method of "validity," "reliability" and "generalizability" simply can't work for us. Qualitative researchers do not believe that subjectivity and social processes can be adequately observed, measured, or replicated, given their specific interpersonal and social context. Our preference for relatively small sample sizes means that our findings cannot be generalized. Our need is for different criteria which acknowledge the subtlety and ambiguity of subjectivity and that, "trust and truths are fragile." Good research engages "with the messiness and complexity of data interpretation in ways that ... reflect the lives of ... participants" (Savin-Baden and Fisher, 2002, p. 191). Instead of looking just towards scientific criteria, we need to celebrate our reflexive-relational capacity and creativity within our methodological integrity. We need to acknowledge the *subtle complexity, enrichment and revelation* that emerges from our qualitative research (Sass, 2022).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) originally proposed four qualitative evaluation criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, to assess the rigour and trustworthiness of qualitative research. *Credibility* replaces the conventional quantitative criterion of internal validity by focussing on the degree to which findings make sense. *Transferability* replaces the concepts of external validity and generalizability by seeking to give readers enough information to judge the applicability of the

findings to other settings. *Dependability* and *confirmability* replace reliability and objectivity respectively. Additionally, they encourage researchers to provide transparent and self-critical reflexive analyses which offer an audit trail through their research processes and open them to external scrutiny.

Other researchers have challenged what they see as Lincoln's and Guba's preoccupation with scientific rigour by arguing for a greater focus on artistic and ethical dimensions. Bochner (2001), for instance, encourages sociological and narrative researchers to: "to give voice to experiences that have been shrouded in silence, to bring our intellect and emotionality together, to merge the personal and the academic, and to give something back to others draws us to the poetic, moral, and political side of narrative work." (Bochner, 2001, p. 155).

With specific reference to evaluating phenomenological research, Polkinghorne (1983) offers the criteria of "vividness", "accuracy", "richness" and "elegance", while Smith et al (2008) – drawing on Yardley (2000) – present four broad principles for assessing quality: "sensitivity to context"; "commitment and rigour"; "transparency and coherence"; and "impact and importance". My own 4 R's criteria (Finlay & Evans, 2009; Finlay 2006) – "rigour", "resonance", "reflexivity" and "relevance" – are similar.

It is precisely our methodological diversity that leads - inevitably - to the use of different sets of criteria to judge the quality of our research. It is down to individual researchers to evaluate their work in appropriate ways. The different authors in this volume provide discussions which point to both the value and the limitations of their research in varying ways. Look out for the explicit and implicit messages given as they account for their research...

Barbara Hannigan, Tim van Wanrooij, Megan Gaffney and **Jean Quigley** offer a fresh and intriguing glimpse into the personal perspectives, passions and values (i.e., “personal ideologies”) of 12 internationally renowned master therapists and academics. Using both descriptive and interpretive analyses, the authors identify key personal and relational themes pertaining to these therapists’ lives, including the idea of being driven by “personal rebellion” as a means to challenge (scientifically) what they see as flawed ideologies in the field and wider society. The master therapists’ ease and deep commitment to care in their relationships with colleagues, students and clients stands out, alongside the difficulty they experience in maintaining a work-life balance. Their findings shine a light on the ethical and professional dilemmas we all confront in practice.

Eugenia Drini, Tom Kent and **Hannah Frith** tackle the pertinent topic of how different therapists conceptualise and engage the notion of shame. They employ innovative methods of data collection (story-completion) and analysis (Foucauldian discourse analysis) to analyse - rigorously and critically - their participants’ accounts. The therapist-participants had constructed shame as a “problematic emotion” that hinders the therapeutic progress by preventing clients from revealing their “true” self. It seems that these therapists saw their task as seeking to uncover what is hidden behind shame. Some participants constructed the therapist as an “expert” who manages their own shame, while others constructed the therapist as “de-skilled” and/or “humanly vulnerable” in relation to shame. The professional relevance of the authors’ research is underlined when they invite practitioners to be mindful of the ways their understanding of emotions like shame impacts the direction of therapy.

Alistair McBeath, Sofie Bager-Charleson and **Linda Finlay** give an account of their investigation into student and tutor attitudes to mixed methods research. The authors show scientific rigour in their detailed descriptive statistics, while their verbatim participant quotations reinforce the transparency of the findings. Their results reveal that a majority of those surveyed believe it is important for researchers in counselling and psychotherapy to have a working knowledge of mixed methods research. Significantly, student-participants lamented the reluctance of supervisors to

engage mixed methods. The importance of this study is shown in the way the authors explore methodological dilemmas and model different research options available to our profession.

That no methodology (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed) can hope to do justice to the range of research questions of interest to therapists is also highlighted by the next article. The central role played by the therapeutic relationship in effective therapy is now supported by extensive evidence, much of it quantitative. **Linda Finlay** attempts what she calls a “small corrective” with a literature review of the qualitative evidence base which she finds to be rich and extensive. Her comprehensive critical evaluation both celebrates and critiques this evidence base, while shedding light on the epistemological and methodological challenges qualitative researchers confront in their project to capture the complexity, ambivalence, and variability of relational therapy experiences across different cultural contexts.

Krystal Scott, Peter Blundell and **Lesley Dougan** use interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to explore *how* person-centred counsellors understand, experience and engage “congruence” with children in school-based counselling programmes. Their findings reveal confusion surrounding the roles and responsibilities involved when working in a school setting and how such confusion affected the way therapists were able to engage congruence with children and young people. Intriguingly, deliberate and selective *non*-disclosure of the therapist process was found to be central to their work towards preserving the therapeutic relationship – a finding that departs from generally accepted views regarding therapists’ work with adults. The authors note the literature on self-disclosure by therapists who work with children is extremely scarce. That this research tackles an under-researched area underscores the significance of the findings.

Exploring another of Rogers’ core conditions, **Tatiana Davis** pursues an unusual line of enquiry by examining the impact of therapeutically-shared imagery on Unconditional Positive Self-Regard (UPSR). In addition to analysing data from four semi-structured interviews, also using IPA, the author offers a vivid reflexive

account of her own experience of employing imagery, both as a client and a therapist. Her findings suggest that UPSR can be powerfully impacted by imagery used within therapy which is helpful in mediating clients' experience and has a positive impact on the therapy relationship. Her use of actual imagery within her research report provides a model for researchers seeking to use creative methods in counterpoint to our familiar use of academic words.

Fiona Peacock offers another arts-based autobiographical piece as she shares her process of conducting doctoral research using Heuristic Inquiry. This involved her diving deep into the nature of her attachment-orientated relational work using *Theraplay* for children experiencing relational and developmental trauma. She describes her journey from wanting to fight the corner for *Theraplay* by "proving" it works, to having the professional confidence to accept that what she does is helpful and sharing her process with others. Her research results in writing a fictional novella alongside her traditional academic thesis. Her findings illuminate the use of "tacit maternal knowing" – a process which will be of particular interest to therapists who work relationally.

Two articles follow which focus on *competencies* for psychotherapist (and psychologist) training and thus have significant professional relevance. In the first, **Jana Kostínková, Tomáš Řiháček, Jan Roubal** and **Adam Horváth** discuss the development of a competency model for the Training in Psychotherapy Integration program in the Czech Republic. Their action research methodology drew on cooperative inquiry principles. The authors note that their competency model – though still a work in progress - is empirically anchored in actual practice. That the model was co-developed by those who will be using it ensures a resonance with the training program's philosophy while boosting its practical utility and professional relevance.

In the second paper around competencies, **Jeremy Vernon** and **Robert D. Schweitzer** explore trainee psychologists' experiences of imposing therapy endings with their clients through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis. Out of the explicated themes, five competencies relating to therapy endings are discussed. Acknowledging the inherent challenges of therapeutic endings, recommendations are helpfully made for the training of therapists which increases the

professional utility of the research, while the depth and poignancy of the data enhances its emotional resonance.

Also exploring training contexts, **Karen Dempsey** explores how storytelling impacts students in their psychotherapy training using a mixed methods approach. Trainees and their tutors expressed that the use of story was important in training with case studies or clinical anecdotes being the type of story favoured by most of the learner participants. Both the awareness raising and modelling opportunities provided by the stories was found to be potentially transformative. The clinical and training relevance of this research is self-evident while the mixed methods approach taken shows methodological rigour.

Ruth Smith offers a literature review around the issue of domestic abuse and coercive control as a way of opening up important discussion about how to work therapeutically with survivors. In addition to highlighting key names and theories, she persuasively draws on her own experience of working with survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence. She demonstrates the social and ethical relevance of her paper in maintaining domestic abuse is a human rights violation while positioning psychotherapy with survivors as an act of "social justice."

Also tuning into the topics of gender and family, **Margarita Chacin** and **Alistair McBeath** explore fathers' lived experience and meanings of being a first-time father (in the United Kingdom). Interviews, analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, show how fathers' understandings of fatherhood evolve over time in the face of the practical and emotional challenges they face. Taking a compassionate approach about these fathers' experience, the authors wisely recommend therapists attend to changing experiences and representations of fatherhood to ensure appropriate psychotherapeutic interventions.

In another paper utilising Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, psychologists from Sweden – **Jens Knutsson, Rebecka Jägestedt, Malin Persson, Jonas Ramner** and **Eva Hoff** – explore therapists' experiences of providing therapy for people with a history of psychosis. The authors examine the role played by psychotic symptoms in therapy while

their themes describe the fascination and challenge of therapists' work in this field. They discuss the rigour, depth and relevance of their research which valuably informs students in training (as well as practitioners) about how to engage therapeutically with this client group.

Nikki Swales engages an intriguing intersubjective reflexive exploration of learning to feel comfortable in her "skin" as a practitioner-researcher while she draws on parallel processes evident in her research exploring skin cancer patients' experiences of helpful psychotherapy. She reflexively uses autoethnography and powerful poetry and imagery as part of her constructivist grounded theory use of "memo-ing." Her recognition of her shame and other entangled emotions is touching and resonates. Her exploration demonstrates the ambiguous layers and depth of relational dynamics which can be reached with qualitative research.

Finally, in a similar vein, we offer a "short report" by **Sebastian Fox**. He reflects on the versions of reflexivity he has engaged doing a constructivist grounded theory study on team coaching. His use of different "lenses" of reflexivity provides an excellent model for all qualitative researchers who are grappling with how to do their reflexivity as part of enhancing the methodological integrity of their research.

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