



## Editorial

I'm delighted to introduce the first articles of our 2023 volume. More will be uploaded in the autumn and my Editorial will expand accordingly. But, for now, regard this as a version of "online first"...

The quality of qualitative research needs to be demonstrated and argued for - but how? How might we justify the value of our research? Quantitative criteria of "validity," "reliability" and "generalizability" simply can't work for us. Qualitative researchers do not believe that social processes can be readily observed and measured, or that situations can be replicated, given their specific interpersonal and social context. And our preference for relatively small sample sizes means that our findings cannot be generalized. Our need is for different criteria - ones which acknowledge that "trust and truths are fragile" and that good research is that which engages "with the messiness and complexity of data interpretation in ways that...reflect the lives of...participants" (Savin-Baden and Fisher, 2002, p. 191).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) originally proposed the four qualitative criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, as a way of formalising 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. They encourage researchers to provide transparent and self-critical reflexive analyses which act as an audit trail about their research processes, opening 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 Rs criteria (Finlay and Evans, 2009; Finlay 2006) - "rigour", "resonance", "reflexivity" and "relevance" - address similar territory.

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. All the different authors in this volume provide discussions which point to the value and limitations of their research in varying ways. Look out for the explicit and implicit messages being 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.

**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 their 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” by offering 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, 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 counter-point to our standard 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 making a deep dive 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.

More articles are in the pipeline and will be uploaded in the autumn. For now, I hope these first well ripened fruits of 2023 will engage and stimulate you.

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