



# European Journal for Qualitative Research in Psychotherapy

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## Editorial

For many psychotherapy practitioners, the word 'research' used to evoke a cocktail of uncomfortable responses, including uncertainty, avoidance, resistance, and shame. Alternatively, research was greeted with a yawn, seen as irrelevant to day-to-day practice and, even, boring. To some extent these responses persist. As members of a relatively young profession, psychotherapists have often lacked the opportunities and confidence to engage in the world of research and understandably find it hard to know where to start. Their difficulties are compounded by the gap – chasm, rather – that exists between academia (theory/research) and clinical practice (Finlay & Evans, 2009).

However, things are slowly changing. With the growing demand for evidence-based practice, the proliferation of university-validated training courses, and the ready access to research via the internet, psychotherapists are increasingly aware of the value of engaging in research and are getting involved.

A key question arises. *How can we psychotherapists carry out systematic scholarly work (i.e. research) that is meaningful and enables us to find answers to questions raised in practice?*

Some researchers adopt a scientific approach. They seek reliable, objective quantitative 'outcomes'

evidence that demonstrates the efficacy of their psychotherapy work.

Others opt for the qualitative exploration of experiential 'processes'; they probe individuals' stories and social worlds in their quest to make sense of inter-subjective and social meanings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Many qualitative researchers are "animated by the desire to do justice to human existence" (Halling, 2002, p.20). They seek to restore a poetic heart to academic writing by drawing on images, myths and creative forms. Here, science and art lend in the effort to capture, or shed light on, our human potential.

Qualitative research is clearly our primary focus for this journal. We honour a multiplicity of methodologies, spanning traditional and new creative radical forms. These reports may use scientific formats or engage more artful, reflexive or philosophical presentations.

Beyond our own personal preference, we all value the way qualitative research is potentially transformational and contributes to the evolving understanding of both participants and researchers. With ethics to the fore, we also celebrate doing research relationally 'with' rather than 'on' participants. We're interested to hear about the lives of our clients and how they experience therapy. And what do therapists themselves think and feel? How do we talk about our work? How do we make sense of it? How do we evaluate the impact of our subjectivity on the research, given our

central place in the co-creation of qualitative research findings?

The articles planned for this 2019 Volume #9 all pay homage to these core principles and ideals of qualitative research. This volume, in particular, is a celebration of different methodologies and research forms. At the same time, each author recounts a journey of exploration which takes them to unexpected places. As you read each one, I invite you to note the elements you find particularly evocative, the moments that touch you personally and the parts where your thinking is challenged or nudged to go in new directions.

In the first article, James Spiers explores the lived experience of being a new mother of premature twins, using hermeneutic phenomenological methodology. He powerfully evokes the emotional conflict which alienates such women from their motherhood and their desire for closeness with their babies. If, however, a new mother is enabled to tend to just one of her twins, Spiers reveals how she begins to develop a fragile sense of being able to cope.

James' study suggests a need for further research geared to helping more women gain speedier access to appropriate psychological therapies in their perinatal period.

The author of the second article, Helen Jolley, also uses a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology. Helen examines the nature of therapist self-disclosure (TSD) – a challenging and controversial issue often shrouded in uncertainty and seen as risky. She explores two person-centred counsellors' lived experiences of disclosing within therapy sessions. Her study reveals the power of TSD to strengthen the therapist-client relationship. Helen's eloquent description portrays the therapists' very human struggle as well as their

commitment to using TSD to facilitate therapeutic goals.

Both James and Helen conducted their research studies as part of their undergraduate psychology degree coursework. I think many students (at all levels) will find this inspiring. James and Helen demonstrate that it is indeed possible to do research as a practitioner-student and get published as a novice researcher.

The third article, by Helen Van Der Merwe, employs a very different methodology: discourse analysis, which is underpinned by a social constructionist orientation to knowledge. Using data from focus groups and interviews, she investigates therapists' (psychologists') accounts of troubling and unwanted emotional reactions within the therapeutic relationship. She shows how so-called "non-professional" emotions create tensions in the therapists' self-concept as "contained professionals". Of particular interest is her 'affective practice' perspective, which maintains that emotions are constructed actively in the moment while also being shaped over time as people carve out familiar embodied ways of being. In her layered discussion section, Helen explores the way these emotions are managed discursively, and their implications for supervision, training and further research.

I am delighted to have such a good example of discursive work in this volume, which aims to showcase diversity in qualitative research. Integrative psychotherapists often seem 'naturally' drawn to phenomenological or narrative accounts of experience. It is useful for us to be reminded of the benefits of stepping back to take a critical look at the language we use in therapy. What is its function and how do we use it? What is its relationship to meanings, identities and social reality? Discourse analysts reject the idea that experience can be accessed directly through talk –

a challenging, thought-provoking idea for many therapists.

The fourth article, by Kate Evans, offers yet another approach, and a radical one at that. In her autobiographical exploration of 'Writing as Inquiry', Kate seeks to analyse changes over time in her own creative writing. She looks at how creative writing can be utilised both in therapy and as an innovative research tool. Interweaving her scholarly reflections and reminiscences with her own fictional writing, Kate artfully models how to dive reflexively into our creative selves to gain self-understanding -- and for pure enjoyment.

The next article, by Janet L. Kuhnke and Sandra Jack-Malik, also embraces art-full reflexivity. Janet and Sandra offer us a layered bricolage of reflexive dialogue, art-as-event and scholarly reflection as they examine aspects of Janet's work as a nurse working with nation members living with diabetic foot ulcers in a Canadian Aboriginal community. They engage an intriguing Aboriginal principle of 'Two-Eyed Seeing', which brings together Aboriginal and Western knowledge systems. This lens helps Janet see how her clinical practice was often inappropriate for her patients whose grounded relationships with Mother Earth clash with practices of Western medicine. Referring to colonial history, Janet asks how she might go from "uninvited settler" to "supportive ally".

Janet and Sandra are not psychotherapists, and they are writing about experiences thousands of miles away (in both clinical and geographical terms) from many of our readers' practices. However, they have a lot to teach us. First, they demonstrate a radical, innovative, reflexive-collaborative, artful qualitative methodology, one which challenges the boundaries of what is routinely held to be 'legitimate research'. Perhaps more important, their stories challenge our taken-for-granted assumptions about relationships, privilege and culture. Of specific relevance to our readers in

Europe are questions about how we work respectfully with diversity and inclusiveness in multicultural societies, including cross-cultural settings. Most poignantly, we are offered glimpses into the reflexive work of a white nurse conducting a doctoral literature review while working alongside nation members who have endured physical and psychological trauma. For all these reasons, I strongly support the inclusion of this fascinating work in our EJQRP.

Perhaps the most profound contribution made by qualitative research is how it offers a way to study ineffable, mysterious and ambiguous aspects of our social world which cannot be observed and measured. Our dream world experience falls into this category and it's a fascinating topic which Claire Mitchell has embraced with passionate curiosity. She explores therapists' experiences of 'flying dreams' and discusses their relevance to practice. A key finding is their fundamentally embodied existential dimension. Of additional interest is her use of interviews and qualitative thematic analysis as her research methods. These methods are particularly suitable for novice researchers and Claire's article provides a good model.

In the article that follows, Maria Luca and Andros Andreou comprehensively map the burgeoning field of literature (both theoretical and empirical) concerning the importance of the therapeutic relationship. Their literature review provides an important snapshot of key relational research in our field and, as such, offers a valuable resource for all therapists. The authors note that there is a shortage of research on how integrative psychotherapists experience emotional connections with clients and this issue became the focus for their study. Employing the currently popular qualitative methodology of IPA, they find that the qualities involved coalesce under three main themes: 'embodied, emotional openness', 'empathy' and 'striving towards a therapeutic relationship'. The authors' fine-grained thematic

analysis is evidenced with extensive quotations from four participants who are all experienced therapists. They offer us important insights into the nature of the experience of emotional connection with clients.

Also employing IPA methodology, Martin Stokley and Val Sanders offer a moving account of therapists' experiences of involuntary childlessness and its impact on clinical work. Their findings demonstrate how therapists' personal histories cannot be separated from practice, given the potential for a variety of transferences/counter-transferences to emerge during sessions with clients. The use of self-disclosure and reflexivity is also explored, in part through the first author taking the novel route of acting as a researcher-participant. As the first ever qualitative study on this topic, this contribution underlines the significance of qualitative, reflexive research as it deftly reveals the value of listening to therapists' stories.

Finally, as part of showcasing a spectrum of qualitative research methodologies, we are delighted to publish a mixed-methods (qualitative and quantitative) study. The authors, Alistair McBeath, Sofie Bager-Charleson, and Abvigail Abarbanel, expertly show how it is possible to mix methods to obtain both breadth and depth, while still being epistemologically consistent and maintaining 'methodological integrity'. In their research, the authors explore therapists' experiences of research writing and academic publication. Their (quantitative) 'results' and (qualitative) 'findings' reveal that many practitioners feel estranged from academic writing. While this derives in part from lack of confidence and fear of rejection, practitioners also hold negative views about academic writing itself: they regard it not only as dry and dusty but also as not really relevant to the concerns and challenges of everyday practice. Such perceptions reinforce the

notion of a wall separating the academic from the practitioner. Many of the quotations from practitioners are likely to strike a chord with you, the reader. I was touched by them myself and I feel strengthened in my resolve to grow this journal as one where practitioners can feel they have a voice.

I hope the rich collection we've amassed in this volume will interest and inform you, and also perhaps inspire you to overcome your own reservations about taking up your pen or settling before your computer keyboard. Academic writing is something every practitioner should consider. Everyone out there in the field has so much to contribute to the enrichment and development of our life-enhancing profession.

On behalf of our Editorial Board, I invite you to submit an article on any aspect related to research and practice for our new 2020 volume, so that we can continue this celebration of qualitative research in psychotherapy into next year and beyond.

## References

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