

Volume 3, No. 4 – November 2002

Review Note:

**Jörg Frommer & David Rennie (Eds.) (2001).
Qualitative Psychotherapy Research: Methods and Methodology¹**

Lengerich, Pabst Science Publishers, 203 Pages
ISBN 3-935357-74-5, Euro 24.-

Abstract: The authors of the volume favour qualitative research in psychotherapy. They show in detail the methods: qualitative results can be achieved. They free qualitative research from the image that it is useful only for "eggheads" or their playground and destroy the simple distinction between science (high value) and hermeneutics (low value). Qualitative Research methods are applicable to the serious problems of psychotherapy and research. Those wanting to know what serious and well-known researchers in the field do beyond statistical programs will profit from this information about an upcoming field and research orientation.

Key words: *qualitative research, psychotherapy*

- [1. Introduction](#)
- [2. A Variety of Methods](#)
- [3. Consequences for Research Politics](#)

[References](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Citation](#)

1. Introduction

Some people still hold Qualitative Research (QR) to be the weak opponent of serious research. Doing QR is misunderstood as "understanding" (*verstehen*) single cases, while quantitative research "explains" things. QR does not go beyond clinical interpretation, while quantitative research "sticks" to the hard facts. [1]

This was the state of things (and prejudices) 10 years ago. Since then, the scene has completely changed. In the English-speaking world, special journals were founded, e.g., "Metaphor and Symbolic Activity." Different schools elaborated on special techniques of analysis and, in Germany, new journals appeared focusing on QR ("Psychotherapie und Sozialwissenschaft – Zeitschrift für Qualitative Forschung" or "Psychoanalyse – Texte zur Sozialwissenschaft"). Even an international and multi-lingual on-line journal, *FQS* ("Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research", now distributes results of QR. Psychotherapy research can presently draw on a huge corpus of methodological expertise in qualitative social research. The difference is not between "hermeneutics" and "science" or between "understanding" and "explaining" but between a medical and an interactive-contextual model of what is going on in a session (WAMOPLD 2001). The publication of a book such as this one by FROMMER and RENNIE marks the fact that QR has earned more than the position of a stepchild in the family of researchers. [2]

¹ This is a revised version of the review in *Psychotherapy Research*, 2002, 12(2), 241-242.

2. A Variety of Methods

Well-known psychotherapy researchers contributed to this volume. The book begins with the editors' introduction, making clear that the dichotomy of understanding/explaining has been overcome and that even quantitative research needs qualitative methodology. Establish a CCRT: isn't there very much interpretation in it? Thus the dichotomy can be changed from quantitative or qualitative to the new one: more or less qualitative! There is more interpretation even in quantitative research than you normally think. This may sound provocative but the arguments are convincing. KVALE, a Swedish researcher, shows the potential of the psychoanalytic interview when done properly. This is more than interviewing patients after the session, a practice compared by the author to interviewing tourists about a country in which they do not live. RENNIE elaborates on Grounded Theory as a core methodological concept aiming to gain categories from the material itself. FROMMER and LANGENBACH show how case studies can be used as a source of epistemic knowledge when established by certain rules, e.g., focusing on the developmental course of treatment, rather than on patient's history. This clear position can be read as a critique to certain forms of publishing of clinical case histories. ELLIOT, SLATICK and URBAN present the wide spectrum of tools of analysis in QR—from Task Analysis to Conversational Analysis. They follow the tradition that QR is much more broadly developed in the social sciences than in psychotherapy research. What convinces most is that SLATICK and URBAN demonstrate how QR works with textual materials and deals with relevant contexts. STILES and ANGUS do the same. They show how QR has modelled and modified the Assimilation Process Model. One can follow, in clinical detail, how clients assimilate dissociated experience. More follows about how research develops. They see their model as a "living thing" and surprise the reader with the statement, "Observations have value as evidence when they change a theory rather than when they leave it unchanged." (p.124) This is charming and refreshing. New insights are valued higher than confirmation of what one already knows. Some years ago, the researcher David REISS (1988) asked, how can one do Psychotherapy Research "without dying of boredom?" Clearly, this is the antidote. [3]

The psychotherapeutic process is not the only interactive dimension. Patients tell us a great deal in their life stories and QR has developed methods to handle their narrations. McLEOD and BALAMOUTSOU show how transcripts can be analyzed, how to segment the narration into portions and how to identify, by microanalysis, specific therapeutic events. The enjoyment in discovering new things is shown here; this includes analysis of therapists' narratives and the exchange of figurative language between both participants—one of the most powerful tools in mutual influencing. This kind of psychotherapy research methodology is strongly swayed by linguistics as well as other areas of expertise. This is more than a statistical methodology that researchers can use to gain important new views and results. [4]

In order to handle validity problems, STUHR and WACHHOLZ draw upon the concept of Ideal Types, demonstrating their procedure with material from psychoanalyses. The position that these authors hold is clearly reflective. In psychotherapy research, one can be misled by the belief that "*data bruta*" can be achieved—in actuality, you have a theory organizing your primary reception of data and you can only re-think how this theory colours your perception. Naive empiricism in psychotherapy research holds no longer. This leads to the phenomenological position of FISCHER, ECKENROD, EMBREE and JARZYNKA who summarize some psychotherapy dissertations from Duquesne University. Their range of methods is derived from systematic desensitisation via psychodrama and paradoxical interventions to dream images. Accentuating special phenomena, like therapists reacting strongly to clients, (for example, clients' struggles to speak or remain silent), the authors show that the process—what they call "the lived world"—of psychotherapy is accessible for systematic research. Clients modify and rework their worlds, "not just their behavior and affect." [5]

3. Consequences for Research Politics

An important codicil is added to this work when ELLIOT and his co-authors, ironically, conclude with a warning that has to be taken seriously. Using QR "may be hazardous to completing your dissertation (or getting tenure)" (p.106). This informative and well-written book ends by giving the general impression that QR should no longer be excluded from teaching and research training—or from funding and financial support. QR has reached a new standard that no longer can be excluded or ignored. [6]

References

Reiss, David (1988). Theoretical vs. Tactical inferences: Or, How to Do Family Psychotherapy Research Without Dying of Boredom? In Lyman C. Wynne (Ed.), *The State of the Art in Family Therapy Research*. New York: Family Process Press.

Wampold, Bruce E. (2001). *The Great Psychotherapy Debate—Models, Methods and Findings*. Mahwah, NJ/London: Lawrence Earlbaum.

Author

[Michael B. BUCHHOLZ](#) is Professor in Social Sciences at Göttingen-University (Germany); research interests qualitative methodology in psychotherapy, the analysis of metaphor in therapeutic dialogues, psychoanalytic theory, professional practice. Michael BUCHHOLZ wrote in a previous issue of *FQS* a review to LAKOFF and NÚNEZ' "Where Mathematics Comes From" (<http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/1-02/1-02review-buchholz2-e.htm>) and a collective review to "Speech and Gestures" (<http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/1-02/1-02review-buchholz-e.htm>).

Contact:

Prof. Dr. Michael B. Buchholz

Schlesierring 60
D-37085 Göttingen

E-mail: buchholz.mbb@t-online.de

Citation

Please cite this article as follows (and include paragraph numbers if necessary):

Buchholz, Michael (2002, November). Review Note: Jörg Frommer & David Rennie (Eds.) (2001). Qualitative Psychotherapy Research: Methods and Methodology [6 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* [On-line Journal], 3(4). Available at: <http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs/fqs-eng.htm> [Date of access: Month Day, Year].