

About this Issue:

Qualitative Methods and Psychology in German Language Countries

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Qualitative-methodical approaches have led a quiet life in the German language Psychology in the decades following World War II. In the scientific community of Psychology, a quantitative direction still dominates, one that follows the scientific ideal of discovery (prototypical: a carefully controlled laboratory experiment). In view of this, qualitatively working psychologists are satisfied when they are allowed to work in niches. Most of the time, they remain peripheral within their disciplinary community. Often they are more or less looked down upon or even discriminated and dismissed. Even though the importance and necessity of a "qualitative" (case, understanding, everyday, biographical, dialogical oriented and so forth) approach can be increasingly seen in various fields of psychological (professional) practice, the academic psychology in German language countries are still quite resistant to "qualitative appeals". There are few opportunities within the disciplinary micro-politics (positions, research monies and resources etc.). This has external as well as internal reasons, which will not be further discussed here. [1]

In the last few years, though, one could believe that a "fresh wind" coming from a qualitative methodical direction is perceivable. Within the disciplinary research and on the level of the disciplinary organizations, a qualitative orientation is being articulated. And for the most part, those working from a quantitative approach no longer attack or ignore this articulation per se. Nonetheless, the success of these initiatives seems to us to be minimal. For example, there are still few psychological organs of publication (scientific journals) in which reports of qualitative research studies have an opportunity to publish or are well received. Due to the lack of resonance within the own disciplinary boundaries, qualitative psychologists often turn for exchanges and cooperation to researchers of other social sciences and thus leave the "center" of their own discipline. Those psychologists working qualitatively, so we assume, are usually only known within relatively autonomous "local scenes", "social networks" and "citation cartels". Although in the meantime there are quite an amount of persons working qualitatively at quite a lot of different places and contexts, usually one is unaware of one another, or does not take any or enough interest. Respectively, the knowledge of qualitative-psychological approaches within the qualitative "traditional disciplines" sociology and educational science is minimal. [2]

With this as a background, we deemed it meaningful to initiate a possibly wide and non a priori (through methodological, ideological or other selection criteria) investigation, finding those qualitatively working psychologists in all possible academic and research organizations. We asked psychologists that follow this orientation (more or less strictly, or exclusively) to give an overview of their research concepts, approaches, empirical projects, etc. [3]

What we did was send, in late summer of 1999, a letter to all heads of psychological institutes in all German language universities and colleges which bid them to encourage any member of their institute who could be interested in participating in this issue. We do not know what exactly was done with our letter in each individual university or institute. But, in this way as well as through an announcement with a call for papers in various German language mailing lists and through word-of-mouth, the contributions collected in this issue came together. They are the first and main part of this *FQS*-issue. [4]

In the following, an excerpt from our "call for collaboration":

We "... have put together a few questions upon which the description of your approach (in an informal style) should be oriented. We wish to thus make the character that a contribution should have clear and also to make the structure of the various contributions similar.

Main topic/question: What is "your approach" in qualitative social scientific psychology?—with the following potential sub-aspects:

- Upon what models and traditions do you call upon within your approach?
- What are your own further developments?
- What are your main agendas, intentions, "missions"?
- What theoretical and/or methodological issues or dilemmas are you working on or interested in?
- What themes, topics and problems are characteristic for your research context?
- How do you see your theoretical and methodological references and anchoring within psychology?
- How do you see your theoretical and methodological references and anchoring within the scientific community of psychologists?
- How do you see the referencing and cooperative relationship with neighboring disciplines?
- What are your preferred information contexts (which journals, media, conferences, discussion contexts, websites and so forth)? ...
- The contribution itself should not exceed 1500 words. ..." [5]

The contributions indeed turned out to be very "informal" and full of variety. Some kept close to the questions, others referred to them in a more loose manner. We accepted the various "interpretations" of our call, and since the length of the contributions was likewise not always the same, we liberalized also on this point. [6]

In the following first part of this second issue of *FQS*, the results of our investigative effort are presented. This includes the presentation of research styles, which have already developed a certain tradition and have manifested themselves in many empirical studies. It also includes the presentation of concrete and individual empirical research projects, more or less broad and embedded in the respective research context, which operate with specific qualitative methodical approaches. Furthermore, several specific problems

involved in qualitative methodic in psychological research projects are briefly outlined and the respective solutions are presented or discussed. And finally, there are several programmatic texts, that deal with the qualitative psychological methodic in their disciplinary placement and scientific-political situation. Since the contributions collected here were not always placeable in one of these categories, we instead present them in the alphabetical order of the authors. [7]

We also like to mention some restrictions concerning the contributions collected in this issue: Although 35 authors participated with 25 contributions about German language qualitative psychology—most of them characterized by different methodological/theoretical orientations and involved in different (research) topics—, this collection is not representative for the whole German language psychology. Only one Swiss author send a manuscript, although we addressed our invitation to psychological institutes in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. A closer look upon the German contributors reveals some additional gaps: So authors who participated in this issue are obliged e.g. to psychoanalytical or narrative approaches, to Gestalt Psychology, Critical Psychology or action theory. (We also like to draw your attention to German psychologists' contributions in the January issue; see [BRAEUTIGAM](#), [JONAS & BOOS](#), [LOESCHPER](#), [MRUCK](#), [SCHMITT](#) and [WITZEL](#).) But contributions are missing e.g. from phenomenological psychologists, as well as from some places like e.g. the University of Erlangen, where action theory and cultural approaches are rather well represented. And especially missing are contributions from qualitative psychologists who do not belong to academic institutions. A last restriction concerns our desire to present—as complete as possible—also English translations of German contributions published in *FQS*. Although many authors also in this second issue did this additional effort, some translations are not available because of time and other reasons (for some contributions a translation will follow during the next two months; see the [table of contents](#) for more detailed information). [8]

Nevertheless, we would be very pleased to see a stronger growing network of qualitatively working psychologists in German language countries resulting from this collection of self-presentations, when the acknowledgment of psychological approaches in the neighboring social science disciplines is positively heightened. The interdisciplinary cooperation would thus also be stimulated—and not lastly, then when the German language "qualitative psychology" achieves or gains stronger interest and acknowledgment in international discussions in the social sciences. [9]

Citation

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