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Subjectivity and Reflexivity in Qualitative Research—The *FQS* Issues[1]

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Abstract: By publishing two *FQS* issues on "Subjectivity and Reflexivity in Qualitative Research," we address a topic that is central for modern science. On the one hand, there are many demands from philosophy of science and there are numerous methods that aim at eliminating researchers' impact on the research process except in controlled treatments. On the other hand, the insight spread that researchers, in continuously interacting with those being researched, inevitably influence and structure research processes and their outcomes—through their personal and professional characteristics, by leaning on theories and methods available at a special time and place in their (sub-) cultures, disciplines and nations. This is especially (but not exclusively) true for qualitative research, because qualitative methods are less structured than quantitative methods, and qualitative researchers interact for most part very closely with research participants in their respective research fields.

Are there any ways out of the dilemma between the hope of arriving at non-contaminated, valid, and reliable knowledge, on the one hand, and the threat of collecting trivial data, producing (unintentionally) autobiographies, or repeating the same cultural prejudices prominent at a time or place, on the other hand? The articles that we introduce here attempt to give some (often provisional) answers: by discussing more principally the relevance of subjectivity and reflexivity in and to the process of scientific knowledge construction and by offering possible theoretical frameworks; by examining the research process, using own empirical examples to show in which way (sub-) cultural, social, professional, biographical, and personal characteristics influence what is perceived, interpreted and published; and by providing tools that can be used to highlight subjectivity in the research process in order to achieve new levels of understanding through reflexivity. We published the *FQS* 3(2) and *FQS* 4(2) issues in the hope that they contribute to open up further discourse on these topics that are essential and challenging for (qualitative) research.

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1 We thank Wolff-Michael ROTH for co-editing the special issues and for his help with the translation of this text.

1. How the Issues Came to Be

Addressing subjectivity and reflexivity appears to be a rather ambiguous task especially when we consider our experience of working on the *FQS* issues. On the one hand, we experienced fears (also within the editorial team) that working on this topic may damage one's reputation as a scientist: Talking about oneself may appear indecent and self-aggrandizing unless one belongs to a science studies discipline. Additionally, the messenger may be called to account for the message—the message being that (social) sciences are inherently structured by historical, local, social and personal characteristics of those involved in them. On the other hand, the feedback we received after our call for papers on "Subjectivity and Reflexivity in Qualitative Research" (November 2001) was immense: Apart from the proposals already mentioned in *FQS* 3(3) (see BREUER, MRUCK & ROTH, 2002) others were submitted with some delay. All in all, we received and evaluated more than 130 abstracts. Our early impression was that most submitters were rather "young," that is, still engaged in the process of establishing themselves in the social sciences, possessing a limited number of scientific routines and skills, struggling for the integration of being an individual *and* a researcher.[2] [1]

After reading and reviewing the submitted abstracts, we selected about 70 abstracts that promised to be especially interesting in regard to our topic and invited the authors to provide us with full texts. Since a more rigorous selection would not have been adequately possible only on the base of short summaries, we decided to go with a larger number of authors and to accompany the more inexperienced authors in the process of producing their texts. Additionally, in the face of the number of potential contributions, we split the planned special issue into two parts: Including all contributions in one issue would have been impossible given the demands of the reviewing and publishing process. [2]

Ultimately we published a total of 32 contributions, which appeared as issues *FQS* 3(3) and *FQS* 4(2). The obvious decrease in the number of contributions was due to different reasons: Some texts were not completed on time, some did not pass the peer review process despite our support, and some were asked to resubmit for publication as single contributions apart from the *FQS* issues on "Subjectivity and Reflexivity in Qualitative Research" (especially those that did not squarely address our theme). [3]

In summary, we feel that the interest in participating and contributing had been greater for many authors than what they could accomplish under the given conditions. One important criterion was that the authors not limit their writing to programmatic statements about the relevance of subjectivity and reflexivity to the qualitative research process, but also provide empirically grounded evidence and examples of the way in which subjectivity influences the research process and to

2 This early impression had to be reconsidered at least for the texts that are published in this issue. The authors are at different stages in their careers: In addition to novices, who have just started to work on their scientific reputation, there are senior researchers, who have been working in the field for a very long time, and finally, there are researchers, who contributed a great deal to qualitative research and are internationally acknowledged.

reflect on how these influences could be used as a tool to improve the quality of knowledge. [4]

2. About the Difficulty to Talk About Ourselves

Why is it so difficult to talk about ourselves and our presuppositions, choices, experiences, and actions during the research process in a sufficiently precise way so that it allows others to follow what we mean and did? In part, it is so difficult because the demand to exclude the researcher's subjectivity (and to include only what seems to be methodically controllable as a treatment) is one of the most important imperatives of the modern science. This imperative has been cultured by methodological prescriptions and has been realized by various methodological procedures. It is secured by the ways in which research projects are evaluated and funded, and it touches our hearts, minds and bodies in a very basic way. Francis BACON formulated "de nobis ipsis silemus [we are silent concerning ourselves]" programmatically in his Novum Organum, first published in 1620.[3] This "pledge of secrecy" was passed on by KANT, who used this particular citation to open his Kritik der reinen Vernunft [Critique of Pure Reason], published in 1781, to REICHENBACH (1970), who distinguished the "context of discovery" from the "context of justification" in the philosophy of science. The everyday scientific life it reached with POPPER's (1984) "Logik der Forschung [The Logic of Scientific Discovery]"—POPPER underscored the necessity and possibility of objective scientific knowledge, a form of knowledge that is created but not contaminated by subjects. Many objections had been raised since then against the idea of constructing objective knowledge. More recent methodological frameworks prefer to use terms like "logic" in the plural form, and the post-KUHNIAN reflexive sciences were concerned with the "Entzauberung der Wissenschaft [demystification of science]" (BONSS & HARTMANN 1985) and with the psycho- and socio-"logic" of research. Furthermore, some explicitly pledge for the re-introduction of subjects into the sciences—we are talking about ourselves" (e.g. RAUSCHENBACH 1996). But this plea was predominantly a programmatic one, which is also apparent in the field of qualitative research, where

> "the phantom of undisturbed research settings is persisting: in the case of research practice by neglecting the researchers' involvement in the research process and its products (naturalism of qualitative research practices), and for qualitative methodologies that ignore their own contingency (naturalism of qualitative research methodologies)" (MRUCK & MEY 1996b, pp.4f; our translation). [5]

Why is it necessary to talk about ourselves and our presuppositions, choices, experiences, and actions during the research process in a sufficiently precise way so that it allows others to follow what we mean and did? It is necessary because without such reflection the outcomes of the research process are regarded as "characteristics of objects," as "existing realities," despite their constructed nature

3 See also the contributions, published in this issue and belonging to the *FQS* Debate Doing Successful Research in the Social Sciences—Ethnography of the Career Politics of an Occupational Group, especially the one of Günter BURKART.

that originates in the various choices and decisions researchers undertake during the process of researching.[4] [6]

At the beginning of the research process we find a researcher interested in learning something about an object or a phenomenon, or (s)he tries—depending on his or her epistemological point of view—to verify or falsify existing knowledge. In doing this, hardly any researcher begins with a personal question (though in a way they might do, usually without expressing or knowing it): Posing a research question in many ways is influenced by what—at a special time or place, and belonging to a special (scientific) context—is regarded to be meaningful and appropriate. A problem, which necessarily occurs if one tries to formulate a r-esearch question is, that whatever should be researched must be named, inde-pendent of whether the researchers are concerned with the structure of a sub-stance or its response in relation to other substances, if they are doing research on human cognition, if they are interested in the characteristics of a (in terms of time or location familiar or unfamiliar) culture, in a specific disease etc. Thus, a psychologist interested in cognition presupposes that cognition "exists" or that it is possible to differentiate cognition from, for example, emotion or action. [7]

In the first step, researchers choose the research object based on what is acceptable to them, their discipline, and the zeitgeist. This choice is an active and therefore constructive process. Once researchers have decided on the nature of their research object, they have to choose—and most times the choice has already been made on personal or disciplinary grounds—what "data" should be collected and what methods should be used. Here, too, person, discipline, location and time of choice have a non-negligible impact on what counts or what ought to count as answerable—this impact exists despite the scientific construct of the appropriateness of the research method to research object. [8]

To choose a method for data collection fixes "possible interactions with the phenomenon under consideration" (BREUER 1996a, p.9; our translation), while others are excluded. It is a researcher, a subject, who enters into a specific relation with the research object, another subject or phenomenon. (On the relation of researchers as subject and their research object see also ROTH & BREUER, this issue.) The concrete design of this interaction determines, what kind of *data*—after additional transformations (often data input in a computer program in quantitative research or transcription of audio recordings in qualitative research)—are the starting point for data analyses. These data are "in principle interactive, social, sub/cultural, situated, and contextual 'constructions' by all persons involved" (BREUER 1996b, p.16)—in the social sciences researchers and participants who actively construct these data, relying on the scientific and everyday life resources and routines available and meaningful to them. At the end of this process we find scientific *facts* that are thought to be and treated and described as characteristics of an object or as "existing" (social) reality. And although many qualitative researchers now acknowledge that scientific results are dependant on the specific conditions of location and time and contingent on the

4 The following is a brief, revised excerpt from MRUCK 1999, pp.3ff.

specific persons involved, the (inter-) subjective modes of constructing knowledge are hardly ever discussed publicly as the *outcome of research*. Even in many empirical studies, by explicitly taking constructionist perspectives, the researcher —inter-acting, choosing, pre-supposing, sympathetic—becomes invisible in favor of mirroring "the other," the object, the phenomenon. Once again, research results resemble photographs that apparently need neither camera nor photographer to exist. [9]

So why should we talk about ourselves? The French ethnopsychoanalyst Georges DEVEREUX gave an initial and a radical answer to this question:

> "The behavioral scientist should not ignore the interaction between the object and the observer, hoping, that in time this interaction would fade away, if [s]he for a sufficiently long time continued to act as if such an interaction did not take place. Refusing to look for ways to creatively interpret this we will end with collections of more and more meaningless, increasingly segmented, peripheral and even trivial data ... Researchers should stop exclusively underlining treatment and manipulation of the object. Instead, they should simultaneously and some times exclusively reflect and understand their role as observers." (1967, pp.19f; our translation) [10]

3. Trying to Talk About Ourselves: The Structure of the Special Issues

What is the researchers' impact on the research process, what kind of stimulus (DEVEREUX) do they constitute for research participants, which interactions take place between the researcher and the research participants and what is their outcome? In which way do the theories, presuppositions, and the rituals of scientific communities influence the research process? What does it mean to use subjectivity as an important inroad to understanding and constructing knowledge? Is there a communicable trajectory from personal experiences via understanding "the other" to creating scientific knowledge about an object or phenomenon? What is "recognizable and reportable following the [methodical] interactions that had been chosen" (BREUER 1996a, S.9)? Given that knowledge is constructed through various decisions and interactions in the research process, are statements about an object or its characteristics justified? How is this made possible and under what constraints? What are the consequences if instead of one researcher a research team is involved in the research process—how do other researchers perceive what is going on e.g. in an interview or in a specific research field, when they interact within the field in different ways, coming to different conclusions, while interpreting the same data? And in what way could/should knowledge construction processes be presented and discussed in research reports? [11]

The contributions, collected in the two *FQS* issues on "Subjectivity and Reflexivity in Qualitative Research" try to answer at least some of these questions. To provide a structure we categorized the contributions into three main areas: foundational considerations and theoretical frameworks (3.1), the qualitative research process (3.2), and tools to uncover and reflect on the subjective nature

of knowledge production in the qualitative research process (3.3). (See BREUER, MRUCK & ROTH 2002.) [12]

3.1 Foundational considerations and theoretical frameworks

The articles under this heading deal with the question whether it is possible to describe the relevance of subjectivity and reflexivity in knowledge construction in more general terms—particularly with respect to methodology and methods of qualitative research. Do subjectivity and reflexivity call into question the possibility of constructing valid scientific knowledge? What are the consequences of taking into account subjectivity and reflexivity for methodology and research methods, scientific discourse, etc. Finally, are there theories that are suited for framing such a perspective?

- Mary HANRAHAN problematizes the body-mind distinction, central for the Western cultural and scientific thinking. Based on her own research project the author makes some suggestions to overcome this distinction in favor of a bio-social system model, and she discusses possible consequences and implications of this model for research methodology and academic writing.
- Against a postmodern conceptualization of the subject-object relation and against mere "impressionistic" procedures and reports, Carl RATNER claims that qualitative methods help to derive objective meanings in psychology. Also critical—in her case on some misunderstandings of epistemological constructionism and their methodological consequences—is Tarja KNUUTTILA: Relative to science and technology studies where the debate originated, she points out an ambiguity of a perspective that postulates with an authoritative impetus the local and contingent "nature" of knowledge.
- Three further articles provide theories as frameworks to solve the "subjectivity problem." For the field of international relations Xavier GUILLAUME suggests a dialogical perspective (inspired by BAKHTIN) as a means to adequately conceptualize the relation between the "cognisant and cognized subjects." Referring to one of his own psychological studies Gavin B. SULLIVAN discusses how the later philosophy of WITTGENSTEIN may help to reflect the consequences of subjectivity for the research process and its results. Johnna HASKELL, Warren LINDS and John IPPOLITO use MERLEAU-PONTY's concept of embodied action to unfold their idea of using subjectivity and reflexivity in the qualitative research process. They demonstrate their own approach and the central role of ethics with examples from drama workshops, and from second language acquisition environments.
- Both Paul ten HAVE's and Thilo WEBER's articles are grounded in an ethnomethodological framework. While ten HAVE—referring especially to GARFINKEL and SACKS—discusses the tension between "subjectivity" and "objectivity" along the category of "membership knowledge" and the possible use of this knowledge both as an implicit resource and as an explicit topic for analysis, WEBER deals with the ethnomethodological conversation analysis as represented and advocated by SCHEGLOFF. Using a classical conversation-analytic topic, "conversational repair," and applying the

ethnomethodological insight that social interaction and reality are locally constructed to social science itself, WEBER demonstrates that every stage of the research process depends on the researchers' presuppositions and decisions.

- Another prominent qualitative research approach, the grounded theory method (GTM), is presented by one of its founders, Barney G. GLASER, who sees himself in opposition to constructivist GTM as it is developed, for example, by CHARMAZ. GLASER stresses that the epistemological and methodological implications of the constructivist re-interpretation of GTM is inappropriate and not more than a special case of method. In his "Constructive/ist Response to Glaser", published in *FQS* 4(1), Antony BRYANT rejects GLASER's critique as uninformed about recent developments, authoritative, and not sufficiently based on arguments: "GLASER's version ... is not the only game in town." [13]

3.2 The qualitative research process

The articles under this section attempt to provide examples from the research process to underline the relevance of subjectivity and reflexivity as possible resources for increasing knowledge. They articulate ways in which (sub-) cultural, social, professional, biographical, and personal characteristics influence what is perceived, experienced, interpreted and published. As every "interpretation is done by subjects, who are prepared to speak from specific positions, to recognize specific objects and others not" (ROSALDO 1993, p.383; our translation), a question resulting from this diagnosis is how others—research participants and other researchers—may influence the research process in a way, "that instead of one monotone (and actually autobiographical) 'authoritative voice' ... the polyphony of voices and interpretations" (MRUCK & MEY 1998, p.303; our translation) may be included in the research process and become visible also in published research results.

- Inspired by a postmodern framework Glenda M. RUSSELL and Nancy H. KELLY provide an overview of the research process by discussing it as "interconnected and mutually influential series of dialogic processes." Harriet W. MEEK underlines the impact of the unconsciousness in (qualitative) research and especially for the development and treatment of work related barriers. She takes a psychoanalytical and psychotherapeutic perspective and "oppositions" herself to a concept of research as a logical decision process.
- While RUSSELL & KELLY and MEEK use data "from others" as a starting point of their considerations, Gert DRESSEL and Nikola LANGREITER are concerned with a self-reflexive science. They demonstrate how to do cultural research of cultural research by applying cultural research-instruments to their day-to-day scientific practice and thereby constituting and reflecting themselves as a field of research. Similarly, Christiane Kraft ALSOP becomes her own "field of research" while examining the tension between "being at home" and "being away," constituting both her personal and scientific experiences. For ALSOP especially "journeys back home" present interesting

occasions to practice self-reflexivity in qualitative research. Whereas ALSOP emigrated from Germany to the United States, Iris RITTENHOFER, also born in Germany, went to Denmark. While ALSOP, following an autoethnographic approach (ELLIS) deals with the existential categories of "home" and "away" and their impact on the research process, RITTENHOFER attempts to demonstrate—reflecting on three research projects she has been involved in and partly inspired by FOUCAULT—the ways in which her long-term academic employment "in a second country" and her scientific work became intertwined.

- Research processes and results are influenced not only by the situated and "horizonal" (BREUER & ROTH, this issue) nature of the researcher's perspective but also by those who are involved in the research as research participants. In the cause of a project on poor urban minority parents and their roles and understandings of science education reform, Kathleen St. LOUIS and Angela Calabrese BARTON were confronted with methodological issues not originally considered as part of the research design. These issues concerned their responsibility as researchers as well as tacit assumptions revealed during the research process. Helen KAY, Viviene CREE, Kay TISDALL, and Jennifer WALLACE had to face unexpected and challenging requirements while conducting a research project with children and young people affected by parental HIV in Scotland. To cope with this it was necessary to have ongoing negotiation between the researchers, the research participants, and other stakeholders during the research process. Such negotiations inevitably unfold power dynamics, a topic at the center of the contribution by Sarah RILEY, Wendy SCHOUTEN, and Sharon CAHILL. From a poststructuralist perspective these authors discuss three empirical projects that focus on (a) women's experiences of anger, (b) men working in professional employment, and (c) mothers' constructions of childcare. To examine the participant-researcher relationships, the authors use three different approaches to reflexivity, applying correspondingly different narrative styles. In doing this they show ways in which the subjective position of the researcher enabled or "dis-enabled" interaction and understanding.
- Some of the articles already mentioned (e.g. RUSSELL & KELLY or KAY et al.) underline the relevance of research teams. To use such teams in a productive way during the research process—in this case for doing PhD research—Judith McMORLAND, Brigid CARROLL, Susan COPAS, and Judith PRINGLE suggest peer-partnership inquiry methods to improve practices of PhD supervision. While exploring the multiple dimensions of supervisory relationships and its development over time both with candidates and supervisors, the traditional academic supervisory relationship is called into question at many levels of inquiry. Stuart LEE and Wolff-Michael ROTH provide a concrete example of how such a process was put into practice. Inspired by the concept of "legitimate peripheral participation," the authors describe the (re-) production of their identities as graduate student and supervisor while the student simultaneously became a member of two communities, qualitative researchers and environmental activists. Using individual

and shared voices they try to show that their graduate training was both, methodologically sound and valid research training at the same time. [14]

3.3 Tools to uncover and reflect on the subjective nature of knowledge production in the qualitative research process

The aforementioned contributions can also be regarded as (subjective, social, institutional etc.) resources available for increasing scientific knowledge while reflecting on the research process. This is especially true for the following articles, which aim at providing productive, constructive, and creative procedures for highlighting subjectivity throughout the research process to gain new levels of understanding through reflexivity.

- Bruce BOLAM, Kate GLEESON, and Simon MURPHY included self-interviewing in their research on lay health beliefs. They suggest a reflexive use of interviews as a means to become aware of one's own interests and presuppositions in the research process in a transparent way to avoid systematic errors. JENSEN and Harald WELZER demonstrate how to draw conclusions from empirical data to the phenomenon under consideration. Using interview examples from their research on transitions and on traditions of historical consciousness, they regarded interaction processes between interviewee and interviewer not as "disruptions" but interpreted them as "gauges of a reality beyond the research situation, since these interaction processes are also part of everyday communications." Grounded in a psychoanalytical perspective, Stephan MARKS and Heidi MÖNNICH-MARKS used interviews from their research project on "history and memory" to show how counter-transference reactions may help to discern latent interview contents. Silvia HEIZMANN refers to an in-depth interview from her research on "working poor" and their experiences with social welfare in Switzerland. The value of the interview was initially underestimated due to its limited verbal data outcome. HEIZMANN shows how applying ethnopsychoanalytical concepts helped to achieve new levels of understanding by relating verbal data, non-verbal interaction and (counter-) transference to one another.
- Besides examples of using subjectivity and reflexivity as tools in the process of collecting and analyzing interview data, two additional qualitative strategies are introduced: Rudolf SCHMITT describes how the tension between subjective understanding and rules of research could be resolved practically for the systematic metaphor analysis. Ernst LANGTHALER discusses possibilities and limitations of reflexive field research within a historical-anthropological community study. Like HEIZMANN, LANGTHALER regards "disruptions" (in his case between the researchers' and the research participants' discourses about local history of everyday life and especially on the Nazi era) as an opportunity for developing understanding and their reflection as a tool to improve one's own research practice and its results.
- Research teams are an important means to prevent the interpretation work from becoming a mere "resource of projections and an agent of manipulation and delegation" (ERDHEIM 1989, p.89; our translation) thereby resulting in a

decrease of knowledge both about the researcher and the phenomenon under consideration. "Only the lived interaction with others helps identify one's own shortcomings: [what improves understanding is] the other's irritations which end up irritating me" (KRAUSS 1996, p.98; our translation). The idea to include and integrate different subjective perspectives systematically in the process of data analysis and in its reflection is used for the Oldenburger action research project[5] as reported by Wolfgang FICHTEN and Birgit DREIER. Inspired by social-constructionist approaches, practice-orientated school projects are carried out by research teams consisting of teachers and students. Within their "Workshops of Sensitivity, Expressiveness and Creativity," Maria de Fátima de A. SILVEIRA, Dulce Maria Rosa GUALDA, Vera SOBRAL, and Ademilda Maria de S. GARCIA implement a similar theory-practice link for research on and with nurses. The authors describe the production of a doctoral dissertation that used ethnographic methodology, and they show how the nurses, sharing the same language and symbolic system, served as being researched and researchers at the same time. Although there are different concepts underlying the workshops in Brazil and the Oldenburger project and although they have different addressees, both use an epistemological model that helps to reveal and explore the interaction between research and everyday life, between research subjects and objects.

- While unfolding the potentials of reflexive field research LANGTHALER simultaneously gained insights into some important limitations, for example, "the reader's signifying power over the author's texts." Here as in many other articles, published in the issues on "Subjectivity and Reflexivity in Qualitative Research," it becomes obvious that research does not end with analyzing data. Because researchers are authors, the question is how the research process and its results should be presented and published. Eileen DAY shows how experimental writing can be used as a means to reflect on subjectivity. Like RILEY et al. and RITTENHOFER, DAY considers the construction and re-construction of the researchers' subjective position as a necessary element of—in her case (auto-) ethnographical—research. DAY tries to overcome a singular authoritative voice and writing style by including multiple voices and realities into her narration. In unfolding the (hi)story of her article she provides a direct insight in her process of knowledge construction. In his theoretically informed autoethnography, Chaim NOY also offers creative and innovative ways to explore, reflect upon and theorize his experiences in writing a dissertation on backpackers' narratives of identity and change. "In times of post-modern inquiry and writing," he closely intertwines the "experience of travel and journey which took place between the interviewees' travel narratives and my own (in the form of a dissertation writing); between 'field' and 'office'; between positivist and interpretive paradigms; between proposal and dissertation, between paternal and maternal sources of writing, and between academic/scientific and poetic expression." Last but not least, Carolyn ELLIS defies the social scientific conventions that DAY and NOY try to reflect on (and in a way justify). Her autoethnographic story deals with the transmission of grave tending and associated family rituals from generation to

5 Oldenburg is a town in Germany.

generation. ELLIS' narration is singular; in unique ways she reports her subjective experiences which others may join in on, may reject, may draw conclusions from or not. [15]

4. Further Ways of Understanding and an Invitation for Future Discourses

The categorization provided here is *one* recommendation to organize the articles published in *FQS* 3(3) and *FQS* 4(2). Other frameworks are also possible: Wolff-Michael ROTH and Franz BREUER propose an activity-theoretic framing of research and research object as a road map for reading the articles. Additionally, Franz BREUER and Wolff-Michael ROTH offer "epistemic windows," inspired by a constructionist approach to knowledge. They propose a way of systematizing methodological considerations and procedures that follows the research process. The articles published are regarded as possible solutions to the problems identified during the research process. [16]

Again: we offer *possible* solutions. The collection of contributions presented here is neither systematic nor comprehensive—such an attempt could have been neither possible nor serious given the nature of our theme. Instead we consider the articles as examples: Other theoretical frameworks could have been used, other perspectives are also available to understand interaction in the research process and the tension between the researcher, the field of research, and the scientific culture (s)he belongs to or would like to belong to and its rituals and routines (VOLMERG 1988). Moreover, additional tools could have been provided to demonstrate the creative use of subjectivity and reflexivity in the qualitative research process to arrive at new practices, new levels of understanding, and increased knowledge. All we provide are the experiences and the situated, local, and horizon-bound knowledge of researchers; there is no objective (scientific) truth, valid and reliable beyond cultures, times, and places. However, we hope that the most extensive collection on subjectivity and reflexivity in qualitative research thus far will promote further understanding and initiate discussions—whether one agrees with or is critical against it. This hope is supported by the fact that authors from various disciplines and nations joined this adventure and gave insights from their practices and knowledge, insights that hopefully may help the international qualitative community. Of course, everyone is invited to join us in these reflection and discussion processes at *FQS* also in the future! [17]

Acknowledgments

To plan, realize, and publish article collections like this on subjectivity and reflexivity in the qualitative research process means an enormous challenge even for a journal published only in one language. It is even a greater challenge for *FQS* since it is a tri-lingual journal that attempts to ensure high quality articles in all its languages. We are doing this because *FQS* provides a possibility for closing the gap between (mostly qualitative) researchers from different nations, disciplines and research (sub) cultures. We know from experience that knowledge exchange is facilitated by our peer-reviewed, multi-lingual, free-of-cost

journal. It is facilitated, because many people are involved in this effort, and we would like to thank here all of those who helped us to present *FQS* 3(3) and *FQS* 4(2) to our audience. We would especially like to mention in addition to the many authors and external reviewers, Tina PATEL, César A. CISNEROS PUEBLA, Euclides SANCHEZ, Daniel Domínguez FIGAREDO, Saul FUKS, Carlos KÖLBL, and Miren MERKELBACH, members of the *FQS* team, Antje LETTAU, and last but not least the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft for funding *FQS* and *qualitative-research.net*.

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