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Editorial

Deborah Bailey-Rodriguez

WELCOME to issue 36 of the *QMIP Bulletin*. At the time of writing, the weather is starting to cool-down after an erratic summer, and the days are quickly becoming shorter. Nevertheless, I hope you have all had a restful summer (seems so far away already!), and have settled into the new academic year. I truly hope your workloads are not too much, despite all that we have increasingly experienced over the last few years.

Here, our editorial team have been keeping busy preparing our latest issue, and we start by giving a warm welcome to QMiP's new co-chairs, Laura Kilby and Sarah Seymour-Smith. They have hit the ground running, steering our committee to ensure the continued visibility and advocacy for the importance of qualitative research in psychology. This issue commences with their column where Laura and Sarah reflect on Simon Goodman's (outgoing chair) role and impact over the years, on QMiP's recent events, as well as on their plans for QMiP. We are excited to see what happens next!

Our View from the Top (VftT) boasts an interview with Michael Larkin, with India Amos and Sophie Williams. Michael shared with us his journey within qualitative research, insight into the new edition of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) book and developments in IPA, as well as about his teaching work.

The interview is followed by the first of our empirical articles, by Louise Parker and Victoria Clarke on the learning experiences of autistic university students during the Covid-19 pandemic. This paper provides important insight to how educators and universities can develop more inclusive and

accessible learning experiences for autistic students, as well as considering qualitative research design with autistic participants. The second empirical article, by Emma Batchelder, Cheryl Dellasega and Martha Peaslee Levine, explores the impact the Covid-19 pandemic has had on recovery for those struggling with eating disorders, through analysis of eating disorder recovery-focused blogs. The authors applied a longitudinal design, to include the recovery experiences of the bloggers before the pandemic, and thus capturing how the participants' recovery was affected by this stressful life event.

The issue then turns to a Student Spot article, by Madalina Groza, an undergraduate piece focusing on the experiences of mental health and wellbeing in young women in couple relationships. Here, the author applied IPA to understand the young women's lived experiences, and how reciprocated investment to the relationship was felt to positively impact both the women's mental health and the couple relationship.

We have three event reviews in this issue: William Day, a QMiP committee member and Early Career Researcher, takes us through the QMiP 'nested' event at the recent European Congress of Psychology (ECP); and Micah Saviet and Louise Underdahl respectively provide us with accounts of their experiences at The Qualitative Report's 14th annual conference earlier this year. We conclude the issue with two book reviews. Firstly, Romany Murray reviews *A Journey through Qualitative Research: From design to Reporting*, a companion book for those undertaking a qualitative research

project. Secondly, Nicky Pilkington reviews *Researching Family Narratives*, a book which details the use and development of narrative approaches to research.

I gratefully acknowledge and commend the hard work of all the authors and reviewers to this issue, and of the editorial team, who continue to help make qualitative research in psychology visible to our readers. We hope you have enjoyed this issue, and encourage you to consider contributing to our next issues. We are always looking for new content, and if you are interested or would like to discuss any ideas you may have for an article, brief report, event or book review, please do get in touch with me via the email address below.

See you again in warmer times!

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Message from the Co-Chairs

Laura Kilby & Sarah Seymour-Smith

HELLO everyone, and welcome to this edition of the *QMIP Bulletin*. In a previous Chair's address, Dr Simon Goodman noted, *'it's the first time we've had a joint Chair-elect, and while individually either would do a great job, together they will be an amazing team'*. Well, let's hope that ringing endorsement was true and is carried forward to our stint as Co-Chairs, but perhaps it's more that between us we can do as good a job as Simon! We are both honoured and excited to take on the role and our first job is to thank the outgoing Chair, Dr Simon Goodman, for the excellent job that he has done. During his time as Chair, Simon has led QMiP in some important contributions. Most recently, QMiP had a 'nested' event at the European Congress of Psychology (ECP) in July this year. Our focus was on showcasing the work of Early Career Researchers using qualitative methods – William Day, Dr Mohammed Malik and Dr Anastasia Rousaki did us proud. We were delighted to have Dr Hannah Frith as our keynote speaker, and we were also very happy to welcome Professor Abigail Locke who led and chaired our symposium of ECR talks. The day wrapped up with a vibrant panel discussion. Dr Hannah Frith and Professor Abigail Locke were joined by yet another leading qualitative psychologist, Professor Elizabeth Peel. Together, our panel shared their expertise, insight and thoughtful reflections about the future of qualitative methods with our lively audience. Perhaps most encouraging was the level of engagement with our event from across the diverse ECP audience. Although we were vying with many parallel sessions,

every seat was taken, and the questions and discussion topics reflected an audience who were deeply engaged in all things qualitative.

When it comes to ensuring the visibility of QMiP, Simon has always demonstrated commitment and leadership. This has included his work to ensure that QMiP links up with other sections, including for the recent BPS cross network Climate Emergency event. Our collaboration here with three other sections is indicative of what Psychology can do when it unifies and, as this event reflected, there is an important role for QMiP members in such work. Simon also played a huge role in helping to organise our QMiP conference in 2022, again his calm approach to navigating the challenges presented by the gradual return to in-person events following the pandemic were invaluable. There is a great deal more that QMiP has achieved under Simon's leadership and, although we don't have space to cover everything, as incoming Chairs we do want to say thank you for all he has done and especially for his inclusive, warm, and empathic approach to leading the work of the QMiP committee through a quite challenging couple of years. We are immensely grateful to Simon for his dedication and his leadership, and we are very happy that he is staying on as outgoing Chair for the next year.

As the new Co-Chairs, we are committed to supporting and leading our fellow QMiP committee members so that we can continue doing the work and driving the ambitions that have long been associated with QMiP – advocating for the importance, relevance and impact of qualitative research within psychology. As we gear up towards the next

REF (whatever that may look like), we want to consolidate our place within psychology, both in terms of research and teaching qualitative methods. We also want to continue to contribute to the progress of Open Science and to ensure Open Science develops in a pluralistic manner that recognises, values and responds to the specifics of qualitative research. We also want to continue our focus on expanding the diversity of QMiP, both in terms of members of the committee and also of our section members.

Of course, we are not doing this work alone. We are very grateful to have an excellent group of individuals on the QMiP committee. Special thanks go to Dr Elida Cena as Honorary Secretary, Dr Astrid Coxon as E-letter communicator and our incoming Treasurer(!), and of course, Dr Deborah Bailey-Rodriguez as *QMiP Bulletin* Editor. It is great to have so many ECR members on the QMiP committee, including a number of new committee members – they are our future. We are also keen to keep up our connections with other BPS

Section committees and our European counterpart, European Qualitative Researchers in Psychology (EQUIP), our American counterpart Society for Qualitative Inquiry (SQIP), and the International Society of Critical Health Psychology (ISCHP).

We will continue to communicate our developing work and our emerging priorities via future editions of the *Bulletin* and through our social media channels. As the QMiP committee, our job is to work with and for all of our members. We do that best by being in touch with the voices of our members – so please do let us know what you value and what you want and need from us. We welcome any ideas and feedback, so do get in touch.

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View from the Top

An interview with Dr Michael Larkin

Michael Larkin, India Amos & Sophie Williams

Michael Larkin is a Reader in the School of Psychology at Aston University and is perhaps best known for his contribution to the development of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Michael, along with co-authors Jonathan Smith and Paul Flowers, recently published the second edition of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research (2022). In the interview, Michael was asked about his personal journey within qualitative research, his approach to teaching qualitative research methods and his hopes for the future of the discipline. The interview was conducted by Dr Sophie Williams (Senior Lecturer in Health Psychology, University of Derby) and shaped into the following article by Dr India Amos (Senior Lecturer in Counselling and Psychotherapy, University of Salford and associate editor of QMiP Bulletin).

S: Could you tell me a bit about your work and its fit within the wider realm of psychology?

M: I mostly work in and around the topic of youth mental health. I'm also interested in how people make sense of their experiences of distress and how they make sense of things that help them to cope or do better in the context of that distress. I'm particularly interested in relationships and systems around the person, so, as well as the young person's point of view, I'm interested in the role of friends, partners, parents, and professionals, thinking about what is going on around young people. Having worked on a Clinical Psychology Doctorate [DClinPsych], and now on an MSc Health Psychology, I also supervise lots of projects that are a bit more peripheral to that which are in the general field of mental health and physical health. Methodologically, my preference is for phenomenological methods and obviously I've written a lot about IPA, although I do sometimes use mixed qualitative approaches and have supervised discursive and narrative work. I'm interested in how those different perspectives might contribute to each other and fit together, as well as the different jobs that other people do with those approaches.

S: You have had quite a wide-ranging career so far, could you tell me a little bit about how you got to where you are now?

Yes, although I'm not sure it is very instructive! I've never had a really clear plan! I did a PhD around people's experiences of recovery from addiction, and I had a PhD supervisor who wasn't necessarily a qualitative researcher but was happy to give me a lot of leeway in terms of the decisions that I made about the methodological approaches I adopted. Although the outline of the PhD I applied for was more mixed, I ended up doing a qualitative PhD and that was really helpful for thinking about what I enjoy doing and what I thought I could contribute.

S: Are there any key milestones that stand out for you?

M: There are bits of fluke-ishness! I moved to Leicester for my second job post PhD and I worked at De Montfort University. I was contacted by a clinical psychology trainee from the other side of the park at Leicester University who said she was doing an IPA project and could she have a little bit of extra supervision around the method. The trainee

was called Kirsty Williams and I didn't really know very much about clinical psychology or the structure of clinical psychology training. It was an interesting project about former refugees' experiences of working as interpreters in the mental health system (Williams, 2004). I was really interested in the project and Kirsty was clearly really motivated by it, so I said 'yes, I'd like to be involved'. That was a great piece of work and from that I sort of had a feel for the shape of a DCLinPsych thesis and the scope and range of it. So, when the job came up on the clinical psychology course at the University of Birmingham, I was probably a lot more well placed to think about what they might need from a qualitative methods person than I would have been if I hadn't said yes to that project. I moved to Birmingham in 2004 and worked on the clinical psychology training programme there for maybe twelve or thirteen years, and I got to meet a lot of different collaborators. Quite a lot of the funded projects that I now work on through NIHR collaborations are with people that I met at that time, either by going to other universities to deliver training, or by external examining with people or co-supervising with local clinicians. That was a really good and unplanned opportunity in terms of opening out the chance to work on larger scale bits of work.

I don't know what the other milestones are – you know another bit of weird serendipity, I do quite a bit of work around co-design and I got involved in that because a colleague of mine stuck his head around my office door one day and said 'I've got an opportunity for you, Michael', and that usually meant that he had got something he wanted someone else to do! He said we had a mutual friend who was sitting on the board of a local hospital and that they needed someone with some skills like mine to do something he said he didn't understand! It was a co-design project. I got involved in it, learning as I went along really. It was at the point when co-design was still a relatively new

approach in healthcare. Again, it was a good thing to say 'yes' to because it meant that I got to spend time around people who were developing the approach and I developed a good sense of what they intended by it, before it became quite difficult to get to those people because they were really busy. If there's anything instructive from all of that, it's that it's sometimes useful to say yes to stuff when you don't know where it will go!

S: That's really interesting, could you tell me a bit more about the work that you do in terms of the interdisciplinary project. What are some of the projects that you're currently working on, or that most stand out to you? Are there components of co-design work within your current research?

M: The first bit of co-design work was at the Royal Orthopaedic Hospital, Birmingham. It was a textbook one because it was physical healthcare. They were building a new outpatients department and they had an opportunity to think about how they wanted it to be, and particularly how they wanted to reorganise themselves within the new space. There were certain things that we couldn't influence, like for example, the architects were several months ahead of us in terms of the physical structure, but we could think about what we wanted the flow-through to be like, or what we wanted fixtures and fittings to be like, and how we wanted the human systems to work within that space. I was fortunate to be able to recruit a colleague with qualitative research experience, Liz Roxburgh.

She was just finishing her PhD at that time, so it was a well-timed post for her before she went into a lectureship. Liz came and worked on the project with me. We did some things that were probably a bit more formal than you would normally do in co-design work. We did qualitative research interviews rather than less formal video-recorded chats. We did focus groups

and Liz did some really good observational work watching the flow-through in the old outpatient's department picking up some interesting kind of points of friction. Then we fed all that back to the people that we had got the information from and we asked them to choose what their priorities were. Following that, we had a big co-design meeting where we put people in mixed teams and they had to decide how to solve these kind of touch points; these things that they identified as stuff that needed fixing, and they came up with action plans. They had a director of nursing who was really onside and really keen on the project, so she made sure that the action plans got implemented. In retrospect looking back at other co-design things since, it was a kind of dream 'perfect' co-design project. There's usually a bit of a bumpier road, but that was a really good way to learn about how it's supposed to go, because everything went really well.

Then subsequently I did various things where we tried to use those same processes in terms of improving things within mental health care. We did a project in Warwickshire looking at acute inpatient care for young people with early psychosis and we built it around three IPA projects (Larkin et al., 2015), one looking at the experiences of young people (Fenton et al., 2014), one at their parents (Hickman et al., 2015), and one looking at the nursing staff who cared for them when they were on a section (Thompson et al., 2019). We used that as the information that we fed into the co-design process. That went quite well. We had more difficulty getting things implemented, but we learned a lot about how to navigate some of the issues in the co-design process around mental health. That meant that when some opportunities to co-design in a more formal research context came along, I had written a bit and had learned a lot about how to do it in and around mental health. I now work on a project called iCATS, led by Cathy Creswell at the University of Oxford. iCATS

is all about delivering an intervention for young people's anxiety via their parents. It's an online intervention and the idea is the parents change the way they behave and talk about emotions in order to improve the child's ability to cope with situations that would sometimes make them feel anxious, and particularly to improve their experience of being at school and their attendance at school. The intervention already existed, but what we needed to think about was how to deliver it at scale in schools and how to deliver an effective formal screening process so that we could work out who needed to receive the intervention and who didn't. The screening is universal, but the intervention is targeted. It turns out that was a good decision because there's been some substantial systematic reviews done recently that show that universal interventions are not necessarily a very wise thing to do with school-aged children (for an overview see Foulkes & Stringaris, 2023). We used co-design to figure out how to navigate that screening process. We worked with children and parents and schoolteachers with lots of tabletop materials and things to help them to visualise what this process would be like. We asked them to tell us about where they thought it would work and where it wouldn't, and what we should do about it. We made lots of changes based on what we learned from them. It has now gone to the randomised controlled bit of the study, which is the last bit and where I've got less direct input until we start to evaluate people's experiences of receiving that intervention, and then there's an IPA component. The things that I learned by doing the co-design stuff ended up feeding into these projects, so in quite a lot of health-related research now I'll have either a dual role where I'll be the IPA person and maybe the co-design person, or sometimes I'm the co-design person and someone else is doing the qualitative part. It has been an interesting transition.

S: It's very interesting to hear about. How did you find being a qualitative researcher in these more clinical settings; and do you think the perception of the role of qualitative research changed over time, in your experience?

M: Some of the skills that come with thinking psychologically and some of the ones that come with being a qualitative researcher are really helpful for co-design work. It's not the whole picture and one of the things that people in that field are very concerned about is that there are lots of us from social science and psychology backgrounds doing research and we don't have formal design training. You need input about design principles as well, particularly on the larger scale work in terms of being able to think clearly about the practical and ethical issues involved in asking people about their experiences and their preferences and priorities, preparing them to work in groups, and facilitating that groupwork in a way that's safe and inclusive – all of those things are well aligned with skills that you learn as a qualitative researcher. They're definitely transferable.

S: One of the other areas that you are particularly known for is IPA; for readers who might be less familiar with IPA, could you give a brief overview of what it is?

M: IPA is an approach to qualitative research that is concerned with understanding people's experience and trying to understand the meaning of that experience from the point of view of the person, in the context in which you encounter them. It draws on ideas from hermeneutic phenomenology to frame its epistemological positioning. It has a commitment to a context sensitivity, which means that it works best with small samples. IPA researchers want to get a sense of who's who, and engage with the detail of the accounts at an idiographic level to draw out something of the nuanced and distinctive ways in which people may

share a particular meaning, or relationship to a phenomenon, as well as the distinctive ways in which it might vary for them.

I think it's an approach to research which is a really helpful counterpoint to the broader disciplinary tendency in psychology to go for the big picture. One of the things that I really like about IPA is it's a way of zooming in and reminding us about some of the ways in which actual human-sized humans don't conform to aggregates. That there's more going on than that!

S: In terms of the IPA book (Smith et al., 2022) and the journey from the first edition (Smith et al., 2009) to the second edition (2022), there are some changes: working with experiential statements and personal experiential themes (PETS) now. Can I ask what's been happening for you and the other authors involved in the development of IPA?

M: Collaboration on the book was a really enjoyable experience both times. It was probably more enjoyable the second time because it happened that we were making the revisions during the summer of the Covid-19 pandemic, and it was really nice to meet online and do bits of analysis together and to discuss progress on the other updates. It was just nice to have this kind of regular time in the calendar, talking to familiar people about something that we all cared about. It was a good space to have open at that time.

I think we probably found ourselves under less pressure than with the first edition. We didn't know how the book was going to go the first time, we weren't quite sure who the audience was. Once the book has done well, you've got a sense of who it's for, so I think those things were probably easier. What changed? Well, in the intervening years there were obviously lots of innovations in IPA, some of which were already on the cards in 2009, others that weren't. In terms of the sophistication of design for example, there are a lot of dyadic and multiple perspective designs around

now (for an overview see Larkin et al., 2019). There was a change in terms of the range and creativity of approaches to data collection that people were using and we wanted to capture a little bit of that. Some of those things had fortunately been covered in a bit more detail in the special edition of *Qualitative Research in Psychology* that Virginia Eatough and Jonathan Smith (2019) edited a couple of years before, so we were able to lean a bit on that work, but we still wanted to reflect in the book that there had been this explosion of innovation.

Also, the status of thematic analysis (TA) wasn't what it is now when we were writing the first edition of the book. The Braun and Clarke (2006) paper was already very well cited at that point. It was doing well, but it wasn't the tremendous phenomenon that it is now. We really thought we ought to be clarifying where the methods share common ground and where they may be pulling in slightly different directions. Conversely, I think grounded theory, which was still quite an important part of the qualitative horizon in psychology had sort of faded a bit, and that's probably due a renaissance! It would be interesting to see what happens with grounded theory, but it seems to be in a little bit of a lull, which I am sure is to do with the loss of Kathy Charmaz, who was a big champion of that approach (Charmaz, 2017). One of the things we obviously decided to change was the way that we presented the analysis chapter. The second edition was an opportunity to come at it fresh and see if we can come up with a way of writing about the process that resonates with all three of us. We had time to do it, so we were able to try it out with students and collaborators. Paul tried it out with his MSc supervisees; Jonathan tried it out with his undergraduate supervisees, and I tried it out on a collaborative project around vaccine hesitancy with some colleagues at the University of Oxford. Everybody liked it! It seemed like it was a reasonable, safe and sensible thing to do, to give that chapter

a refresher and to present it in a new way. So far, I think the feedback has been pretty positive; hopefully it's useful.

S: It is really interesting to read about the development of IPA as a qualitative research methods teacher. There's still that little bit of overlap between use of the language from the 2009 edition and using the newer language [from the 2022 edition], which I'm sure we'll see a shift to...

M: I don't think that matters because it's not like the other book goes away, or that any of the other methods chapters or papers that people have written go away. I think it's perfectly OK for someone to do a piece of IPA work and not choose to use the framework in the latest edition of the book, but instead to draw on terminology from the earlier book or one of the other methods chapters. I think they're all trying to describe a way of working that has got the same ethos, the same epistemological focus. If the way that you write about that and the language that you use give ways of thinking about your data is different, I don't think that matters; it's whatever resonates with you. In supervision I would often say 'read a couple of different methods sources and then come back to me and tell me which one you like and then we'll work with that'.

S: I just want to come back to something you mentioned around the 2022 edition and it helping to differentiate a little bit more between TA and IPA. As you said, we've had a lot over the last decade with Braun and Clarke positioning TA, and they do say on their website[1] 'this is when you might want to use TA and this is when you might want to use IPA'. From your position, is there anything that really stands out about the difference between doing Reflexive

[1] <https://www.thematicanalysis.net/>

Thematic Analysis (RTA) and IPA outside of sample size for example?

M: You could load an RTA with a phenomenological lens and then at that point those two approaches do get quite similar. I think one way in which they differ is probably that idiographic commitment within IPA. Typically, the sample size might be a little bit more generous for TA. My reading of TA is that you're generally more interested in focusing on the patterns in the data than in the convergence and divergence in the data, which is the more idiographic way of doing things. I think that slight difference of emphasis would still distinguish the two. In a way, I don't know if it matters all that much because it's about doing good work isn't it? These approaches are there to help researchers to line up the different components of their thinking, so that the work is coherent and consistent. So that there's a way of talking about the outcome which is consistent with the epistemological commitments that were made at the outset. When I'm reading a good piece of research, I am less interested in whether someone could have used another method or not. Of course, sometimes there are situations where you could use Charmaz's grounded theory or a phenomenologically loaded version of RTA, or IPA, and any one of the three might interchangeably have been interesting and appropriate. They'd have led to slightly different outcomes, they wouldn't all be identical, but any of them might have worked for a question about how people make sense of a particular kind of shared experience and that's alright. Then there are other situations where maybe IPA is the more logical choice because there's a commitment to context and small *n* and idiography. There are other places where grounded theory might be the appropriate choice because there's a commitment to theory building and a more diverse sample, and so on. I think it's...

S: ...whatever answers the research question!

M: Yes exactly – thanks for finishing my thought!

S: I'm going to move on to ask you about your teaching work. You said that you teach on an MSc Health Psychology and have taught on a Clinical Psychology Doctorate too. Can you talk a little bit about your approach to teaching qualitative methods, what do you keep at the forefront of your mind when you're teaching?

M: I think it really depends on who you've got in front of you, how long you've got them for and what they want. Ideally what I like to do is show up with quite a few options and then sort of see what people want from the sessions. My default way of teaching, particularly around IPA, has been to take 15-30 minutes at the start of the session and figure out what the agenda is for the session and then spend the rest of time working through it – so each workshop is different. In terms of teaching qualitative methods in a more structured way, like within the MSc, we tend to start with epistemology and reflexivity. We start with generic concepts thinking about what kinds of knowledge we might be interested in getting at, and how that might differ from the ways that we normally get at knowledge in the discipline of psychology. How it might deal differently with different kinds of problems that psychologists have to deal with, so the fact that they study organisms who change their behaviour based on what other organisms say about them, that kind of thing! Often what I've then done is start with a generic process of 'if we were to look for detail in qualitative data and draw patterns out of that detail and call those things themes, what would that the process be like, and what kinds of things might we notice whilst we are doing it?' So to get people doing really basic thematic analysis quite quickly and then using that as a springboard to think about the ways that putting a different lens in front of that might pull you in different directions. Usually, I do some work around a phenomenological way of interpreting the data, and then a more discursive way of interpreting the data. I like to

have assessments where you can get students doing that with parallel bits of analysis. We do that on the on the MSc Health Psychology at Aston University. Students do two pieces of analysis on the same bit of data and reflect on how the approaches are similar and different and what that means for qualitative analysis. I think that if you can get people doing that, I think that gives them a more sophisticated understanding of lots of the other practical questions around qualitative research. Stuff about sample sizes and data collection type, or whether you want somebody else to look at your themes, and if so what the purpose of that is. All of those things sort of follow on from understanding what your epistemological position is.

S: I can hear those elements of co-design coming into your teaching; it's interesting how your research practice and interdisciplinary work is spreading through to your teaching approach. I'm going to ask about a slightly different area now; you recently wrote a very interesting article about open data and qualitative research (Larkin, 2022)[2] and tweeted [3] [4] about it too. Firstly, for people newer to research that might not be aware of this conversation around open data, I wanted to ask if you could describe and position where this sits with qualitative research currently?

M: It's part of the package of open science initiatives. From the point of view of people doing quantitative, empirical or experimental work, the idea of making your full data set available to other people is an important part of a commitment to transparency. It is about letting other people check your analysis or run alternative analysis. It's a way of preventing bad practice, or sleight of hand if we're being a bit more forgiving. As a straightforward import, the idea for qualitative researchers is

not that helpful. I think there's a range of conceptual, practical and ethical reasons why it's a bit more complex for us and I think the thing we would be more comfortable and better off being transparent about is not data, but process. Qualitative work has progressed tremendously since I did my PhD in terms of its place, particularly within applied health research. It is seen as an essential piece of the jigsaw and that's great. What we've been less good at, I think, is carving out a different space for how we publish and what published papers look like. I mean, I can say I've made absolutely no effort to do this (!) but I think with hindsight we should have been working harder to try and create a way of presenting qualitative work which brought more of the reflexive material into the published output. What most of us have done, most of the time, is accept that publication is a kind of compromise, where we kind of slice away quite a lot of that material in order to tell the main story about the outcome.

In terms of what qualitative work has got to say and do about the values of the researchers and the stake and interest that they have, an important response to that problem for us as qualitative researchers is to be able to show a little bit about what we brought, what effect the work had on us, how we managed those things, so that the reader can judge for themselves whether to take us seriously or not. I don't think we've done a great a great job of carving out that space so I guess that's really what that piece is feeling its way towards. Rather than just replicating the idea of open data from quantitative to qualitative, if we were to be more open, what would it entail?

S: Thank you. The closing question is looking at qualitative research in the last decade. We have seen it grow, both in terms of its use and the awareness of qualitative research and what it can

[2] <https://michaellarkin.substack.com/p/interrogating-openness>

[3] <https://twitter.com/ipanalysis/status/1554826054904078337>

[4] @ipanalysis <https://twitter.com/ipanalysis>

actually bring. What do you see as the next steps, or the future, for qualitative researchers? What would you like to see happening in the next five years?

M: When I did my PhD, it felt like I was in a sub-discipline of psychology. That has exploded since. It has become very interdisciplinary so qualitative researchers in different disciplines are connected with each other and are much better at thinking about what they have in common with one another and where their disciplinary differences might be more or less relevant. I think if I can zoom in a bit, I think from a phenomenology point of view, the next and probably most pressing thing is how we come to better appreciate, support and accommodate the role of lived experience researchers. I think that needs theorising and articulation and it needs lived experience researchers to be part of that. You know it can't be just academic phenomenology people imposing a model. I think there are two groups of researchers trying to do complementary things and one group are doing it on the basis that they have experience of a particular life event or situation, which is particularly important in mental health, and across the health spectrum there are people doing this work. The other group is the more conventional academic third person researcher trying to understand those experiences from outside.

The ethnographic literature is probably going to be quite helpful in how we navigate those things. It's a literature that has already thought quite hard about what it means to be an insider or an outsider, or a bit of both, and how to manage those kinds of perspectives. I think there's something interesting to be done about understanding the similarities and differences between those kinds of ways of working that I think needs articulating.

S: It was a challenging question! Is there anything that you wanted to raise that's important to you or on your radar at the moment that that you'd like to bring awareness to or have discussed?

M: I didn't really think about that! I suppose the main concern is that the machinery of academic research means that a lot of qualitative researchers, particularly in their early career, are still in quite insecure employment. They're on fixed term contracts and it's pretty much impossible to get universities to think differently about how to support those people and how, from the universities' point of view, to make the most of what they've already invested by employing them for a number of years. There must be better career development for early career researchers. It's interesting because in qualitative research and psychology, there tends to be more women than men. I think early career job security is particularly important. Often people are trying to start families at that stage in their life and I would really like to see something different happening in the way that universities think about their fixed-term contract research employees. That would be really good.

S: Thank you so much!

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Empirical article

The learning experiences of UK autistic university students during the Covid-19 pandemic

Louise Parker & Victoria Clarke

This study explored the learning experiences of autistic university students in the UK during the Covid-19 pandemic, covering the period from the first lockdown in March 2020 to the removal of restrictions in July 2021 and the subsequent return to in-person learning. Data were generated from 17 participants using an online qualitative survey and were analysed with reflexive thematic analysis. We developed an overarching theme of ‘change impacts learning’, which encompassed the following three themes: 1) ‘online learning worked for me’ (including the sub-theme ‘the freedom and control of home learning’); 2) ‘online learning didn’t work for me’; and 3) ‘returning to campus brings so many challenges’. Changes to teaching delivery and subsequent impacts on learning highlights potential adjustments that can be made to increase the accessibility of higher education for autistic students.

Keywords: *Autism; Masking; Online learning; Higher education; Qualitative survey; Reflexive thematic analysis.*

Introduction

INCREASING numbers of autistic students are enrolling on university courses (Davis et al., 2021). It is unclear if this is because of higher rates of diagnosis in recent decades (Russell et al., 2022) or if more autistic people are choosing to go to university. The sensory, social, communication and processing differences that characterise autism vary between individuals; the needs and strengths of autistic students are also diverse (Anderson et al., 2017; Toor et al., 2016). Because of this, individualised support for autistic university students is essential (Kuder & Accardo, 2017). To develop these types of support, for those who want and need it, listening to autistic students’ experiences of higher education (HE) is crucial.

Research on autistic university students’ experiences has been sparse until very recently (Davis et al., 2021). Research in this area now needs to take account of the forced changes in the way universities

deliver teaching as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Methods that were previously relatively unchartered for most academics rapidly became the norm with the onset of the first lockdown in March 2020, and, according to one report, almost a third of UK universities are continuing to provide blended learning (Standley, 2023).

Prior to the pandemic, research that addressed autistic students’ experiences of online learning at university was scant (Adams et al., 2019), with studies often employing case-study methods to explore the challenges and opportunities of online learning within particular learning contexts (e.g. Downing, 2014; McDowell, 2015; Meyers & Bagnall, 2015). For example, Downing (2014) explored a mature-aged student’s experience of online teacher education and the barriers created by online delivery including the lack of opportunities to communicate with staff, ambiguous instructions, being distracted by spelling errors

in teaching materials and other students' behaviour, and the lack of linearity in the learning environment. McDowell (2015), by contrast, highlighted the benefits of online learning by exploring how an online learning intervention enabled an undergraduate computing student to more fully participate in group activities. Meyers and Bagnall (2015) identified both benefits and challenges to online learning in their examination of the experiences of a mature-aged education student. The student valued the flexibility of online learning but felt uncomfortable with computer technology, and experienced a high level of disorientation – losing their sense of direction and not having the cognitive ability to orient himself – in the online learning environment. Though case study approaches such as these provide a detailed and rich account of an individual student's experience in a particular online learning environment, or with particular technological interventions, they cannot capture the inherent diversity in autistic students' experiences in university education more broadly.

Research on online learning to date has shown that online delivery can reduce some of the challenges of in-person learning for autistic students (Simpson et al., 2019). However, online learning differs from in-person and requires a certain set of skills, such as self-regulation, self-discipline, and planning and organisation (Kauffman, 2015), that can be difficult to master for many autistic students, because of autism related differences in executive function (Gurbuz et al., 2019). Therefore, the use of online learning can negatively impact the learning experiences of autistic students (Adams et al., 2019).

The current study

Participants in the pre-pandemic literature could choose to complete one or more modules online (Adams et al., 2019). However, the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns meant students had no choice in how their

course was delivered. Since the pandemic has exposed more students to online learning, it has provided the opportunity to further explore autistic students' experiences of online learning, particularly when that learning modality is not specifically sought out. Thus, the current study explores autistic students' experiences of online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns and the subsequent easing of restrictions.

Methodology

Researcher personal statement

We are both neurotypical; the second author is physically disabled. The first author considers herself an 'informed outsider' (see Scott & Sedgwick, 2021, p.4) as the parent of an autistic child, which means she has some understanding of the stigma autistic people are subjected to in society, as she experiences this through her child, as well as having her own lived experience of stigma as a parent (see Liao et al., 2019). She has also experienced some of the challenges faced by autistic children in (primary and secondary) education. In addition, she shares with the participants the experience of attending university during the pandemic, the rapid transition to online learning and then the return to campus. However, both authors are acutely aware that we can never really know how it feels to be autistic. We also acknowledge the fraught history of autism research, with much research being produced by professionals without lived experience of autism, and debates about who has the authority and knowledge to conduct research on and therefore effectively speak on behalf of autistic people (Hens et al., 2019). We are also aware of research showing that autistic adults are more likely to describe autism as a neural difference and oppose the deficit-based medical model than non-autistic adults, and of arguments that autistic adults should be considered autism experts and involved as partners in research (Gillespie-Lynch et al.,

2017). For this reason, we sought feedback from autistic people during recruitment; but acknowledge that the pragmatic constraints of the project did not allow for the involvement of autistic people as full partners in the research.

Design

Qualitative research allows the exploration of the nuances and complexity of autistic students' experiences (Barkas et al., 2020). Such research can inform how universities develop more inclusive and accessible learning experiences. This research was conducted when pandemic-related restrictions on in-person research remained in place at the authors' university, as such online qualitative surveys were used to generate data via the *Qualtrics* survey platform. Qualitative surveys consist of a number of open-ended questions to which participants respond in their own words and in as much detail as they choose. Online surveys provide a strong sense of 'felt anonymity' (Braun et al., 2021, p. 644), an important consideration given the stigma associated with autism. Qualitative surveys also allow people to participate without the time constraints associated with other methods such as interviews (Braun et al., 2021). Such flexibility could be useful to autistic people who may need additional time to process questions (Frith & Happé, 1994), without the pressure of in-person social interaction and the social norms associated with this. Qualitative surveys can also contribute to participants having a greater sense of control over the research, affording them the opportunity to challenge the researcher without the constraints of normative politeness, which might be expected in an interview (Braun et al., 2021). This was especially important given the first author's position as an informed outsider researcher; feedback was both welcome and useful (see below). It is also important to acknowledge the limitations of qualitative surveys as a static form of data generation, which do not provide participants with

the opportunity to clarify the meaning of a particular question. Participants can email the researcher to seek clarification, but this places the onus on the participant, and an immediate – in the moment – response may not be forthcoming. Participants were given the option of taking part in an interview instead of completing the survey, but none opted for an interview. The data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) within a broadly critical realist framework (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Participants and recruitment

A variety of online recruitment strategies were used: sharing the study on social media, including in relevant closed groups with the moderator's permission, the University of the West of England's psychology participant pool, with university societies for neurodivergent/autistic students, and national and local autism charities and research groups. Initially inclusion criteria specified a formal diagnosis, but following feedback from recruitment contacts who were autistic, students who self-identified as autistic were subsequently included. This expanded recruitment criteria acknowledges the validity of self-identification within the autistic community because of flaws and gatekeeping in the diagnostic criteria and process (Ferguson, 2022). Furthermore, participants had to have experience of the transition from in-person to online learning during the pandemic. The survey was closed after three months, with 17 responses. Fifteen participants reported having an autism diagnosis, two self-identified and were seeking a diagnosis. One participant did not provide demographic data (indicated by ND – no demographics – below). Of the 16 participants who did, six identified as male, six as female, and four as non-binary/third gender, and they were aged 18-35 years. Participants were mostly white, except for four, who identified as mixed race. Degree courses included various social science and science subjects, and participants were mostly undergraduates, with two post-graduates.

Data generation

The British Psychological Society's (2021) *Code of Human Research Ethics* was adhered to in all aspects of the research. The study received ethics approval from the University of the West of England Psychology Ethics Committee. The survey was designed so that the landing page included information about the study, what participation involved, and how the data would be used. This was followed by consent and demographic questions, then the substantive survey questions, which covered learning experiences during the lockdown and following the return to campus, and opinions on the extent to which staff and other students understand autism. During the recruitment process, two

participants gave feedback on the survey, which led to changes in the design of the survey, to improve accessibility. The final survey design included fewer but broader substantive questions and the demographics were moved to after the substantive questions (for the final survey questions, see Box 1). As is common with qualitative survey data, the responses varied in length – some were relatively brief, others longer, but all provided highly relevant and focused data, and the responses were generally dense with meaning and there were some rich and evocative accounts of participants' experiences with online learning (Braun et al., 2021).

Box 1: Substantive survey questions.

1) Please describe your experience of being a university student during lockdown.

Give as much detail as you wish; things you may like to write about in your answer:

- What it was like changing to online learning.
- How you felt about learning online.
- What aspects of online learning you found beneficial to your learning style and what aspects you found challenging.
- How supported by your university you felt during lockdown.

2) Please describe your experience of being a university student since lockdown restrictions have been lifted and universities have begun to re-open and deliver blended learning.

Give as much detail as you wish; things you may like to write about in your answer:

- If you have continued your studies exclusively from home and your reasons for making that choice.
- If you are attending university in person and what the return has been like for you.

3) To what extent do you think other students and university staff are aware of or understand autism?

Give as much detail as you wish; things you may like to write about in your answer:

- If you think learning materials are presented in an autism friendly way.
- If you tell other people at university about your autism.
- What you think other people at university think about autism.

Data analysis

The first author led the analysis and began the process of data familiarisation during data generation. When the survey was closed, she read the whole dataset several times and made notes on things that were potentially analytically interesting. Familiarisation was followed by a systematic coding process. Codes were then clustered into potential themes. After several rounds of clustering and reclustering, we organised the themes into three levels – an overarching theme, three themes and a sub theme nested within one of the themes. The overarching theme ‘change impacts learning’ encompassed the following three themes: 1) ‘online learning worked for me’ (including the sub-theme ‘the freedom and control of home learning’); 2) ‘online learning didn’t work for me’; and 3) ‘returning to campus brings so many challenges’. The well documented stigma of autism (Botha et al., 2022) is briefly discussed before the presentation of the themes because it provides an important context for the analysis and autistic students’ experiences of HE more broadly. Typographical and other errors in the data have been corrected to aid readability and pseudonyms allocated to participants to personalise the data whilst maintaining anonymity.

Analysis

Although there is reported to be increased knowledge about autism and reduced stigma at universities (Stronach et al., 2019), whether students chose to disclose or not and whether this decision was related to perceived stigma or not, it was clear that they felt autism was not spoken about at university: *‘It’s not something that normally comes up in conversation.’* (Noah, UG, Y3), *‘I’ve not heard anyone talking about it at uni yet.’* (Sandra, UG, Y1). Previous literature has discussed the lack of understanding from others that many autistic students experience (Accardo et al., 2019; Clouder et al., 2020). Both the current study and existing literature suggest that silence about autism among university

communities seems to be the norm, whether that be in the form of a lack of open discussion, a lack of communication and education about autism, or autistic students’ feeling scared to disclose because of the reaction they anticipate from others. In line with previous research (Bakker et al., 2019; Bolourian et al., 2018), many participants chose not to disclose their autism diagnosis, and most of those who did, did so selectively citing fears based on perceived stigma and a lack of acceptance. For example, Harriet (UG, Y3) had not disclosed because *‘I don’t want to be seen as different or incapable’*, whereas others had disclosed selectively and strategically: *‘Yes to get DSA [Disabled Students’ Allowance] and adjustments to exams. Not to many people. I don’t want people to think I’m different or feel sorry for me’* (Chris, UG, Y3); *‘only a few people. I’m worried it will affect my future career’* (Avery, UG, Y2).

‘Online learning worked for me’

Around half of the participants reported that online learning was preferable to in-person learning. They adapted to online learning well and found it enjoyable, easy to engage with and beneficial to their academic outcomes. The transition to online learning was an abrupt one, students were given little notice of the move to online learning (Raaper et al., 2022). Research on the transition to university under pre-pandemic circumstances indicates that autistic students find this transition difficult (Clouder et al., 2020; Nuske et al., 2019), by contrast, the transition to online learning was welcomed. As well as being worried about catching Covid-19, the move to online learning reduced anxiety regarding travelling to and being on campus: *‘I didn’t struggle it was easier for me as my anxiety was high’* (Caitriona, UG, Y3); *‘One of my major struggles is taking public transport. I was always late or overwhelmed’* (Charlie, MSc, Y2). Arriving at campus in a state of high anxiety and feeling overwhelmed could be barriers to learning effectively, which online learning removed.

Students who reported benefitting from online learning indicated that recorded lectures were especially useful given their comparable accessibility and flexibility, allowing students to structure their learning as they desired, pause for breaks, replay parts and rewatch for revision purposes. For example: *'it is good to be able to watch parts back again and again to get an idea through your head that you may not have got if it was presented live to you'* (Sandra, UG, Y1). This perceived improvement in accessibility and flexibility of taught materials impacted students' learning and their engagement in their studies. Many of these participants reported an increase in their engagement with taught material: *'I've seen more lecture material with them being online than in my whole uni experience'* (James, UG, Y3). Previous research has shown improvements in engagement levels are likely to produce higher academic achievement (Collie et al., 2017). Thus, this study indicates that online delivery/recording lectures is an important reasonable adjustment that increases accessibility for some autistic students.

Changes to assessments were also received well, especially exams being moved online, often with longer windows for completion or flexible start times. This flexibility reduced the stress associated with traditional format exams: *'I love having my exams online. It's way easier to focus when I am home. It makes the whole process less stressful'* (Dave, UG, Y3); *'Online exams are good you can choose what time of day to start feels less pressured I can plan my day better'* (Chris, UG, Y3). Additionally, online exams were often open-book and not timed, giving students an opportunity to demonstrate their academic skills without the pressure resulting from traditional exam formats. Stress can have a disadvantageous impact on exam performance (Kleine-Borgmann et al., 2021; Putwain et al., 2015); the greater flexibility afforded by online exams reduced stress for these students and some reported their

academic performance improved during home learning: *'allowed me to achieve my best grades'* (James, UG, Y3); *'Now my grades have improved because there's less 'noise' or less barriers to my learning.'* (Charlie, MSc, Y2).

The freedom and control of home learning

Participants who valued online learning reported that it gave them control over how to structure their days, allowing them to incorporate breaks when needed, rather than when their timetable dictated these were permissible, and practice better self-care: *'Now I can eat properly and do other things I did not have time for before'* (Sandra, UG, Y1); *'being at home meant I could plan my day how I wanted and take breaks when I wanted'* (Simon, UG, Y3). These participants valued being able to plan their days in a way that allowed them to learn when they felt best able to: *'I liked I could do [listen to pre-recorded lectures] when I was able to, rather than only at the time'* (Caitriona, UG, Y3). Being in control of their own time was also important: *'I had full control of my time, from my desk'* (Harriet, UG, Y3). The feeling of being in control over their lives is important to autistic students (Scott & Sedgewick, 2021); when students are in control of their own routines and time, they know what to expect, and the unpredictability that can be uncomfortable or distressing is reduced. Being at home provided an environment for the student *'where everything is controlled and predictable'* (Harriet, UG, Y3).

The freedom to be themselves and behave in the way they naturally would without fear of stigma was also valued: *'It gives me the freedom to do my own thing while also watching a lecture, whereas I do not think I would have that freedom in a lecture room. I am able to do my own thing without worrying about people watching me, and feeling judged'* (Avery, UG, Y2). This removal of worry about being on campus was also clear in Charlie's (MSc, Y2) response: *'I can wear comfortable clothes, have my things around me, not have to worry about lighting or tempera-*

ture or background noise that I can't control. I can eat and go to the bathroom when I want.' The removal of sensory distractions and worrying about other people's perceptions is likely to have improved students' focus on their studies.

Overall, the combination of freedom to be themselves and control over their own time was something students found beneficial to their wellbeing and academic focus. Research indicates that mental health conditions detrimentally impact the academic performance of autistic students (Kuder et al., 2021), and they have higher rates of mental health conditions compared to their neurotypical peers (Davis et al., 2021). Therefore, reasonable adjustments that improve mental health for autistic students are important to increase engagement and prevent autistic students dropping out before the completion of their degree, as currently dropout rates for autistic students are higher than for their neurotypical peers (Cage & Howes, 2020).

'Online learning didn't work for me'

While some thrived from home learning, others did not have such a positive experience. These participants found online learning challenging; the transition to online learning was hard, which had repercussions for their engagement with their studies and academic performance. They struggled to maintain focus and keep up with what was expected of them. Bundy et al. (2021) reported increased levels of anxiety, depression and stress during and since the pandemic lockdowns for autistic students. Although none of the students mentioned struggling with lockdown, one participant did mention depression, coupled with a difficulty in asking for help, leading to a complete disengagement with their studies for a prolonged period that seemingly went unnoticed by their university: *'there was a time where I didn't do any work for 2 months, I was too scared to contact anyone, I was really depressed'* (Chris, UG, Y3). This is concerning, both

in terms of student mental health and the difficulty of maintaining regular contact with students when learning moves online.

Participants reported not feeling supported in the transition to online learning and there was an underlying sentiment of both feeling alone and being in the same boat as everyone else. The latter evident in a feeling of camaraderie – that everyone, students and lecturers alike, were doing their best to adjust to this sudden and significant change in university life. When asked if they felt supported in the transition to online learning, the following types of responses were common: *'No but everyone was the same everyone found it hard including lecturers I think'* (Chris, UG, Y3); *'No. We were pretty much left to fend for ourselves'* (Emily, PhD). In addition to adjusting to being at home, students were also required to use unfamiliar learning platforms and navigating these was difficult at times. This added to the feeling of 'going it alone' because students felt these were not explained in advance. Another problem participants encountered was the lack of consistency in the formatting of online learning materials and not having enough time to familiarise themselves with these materials before teaching sessions: *'learning materials are often not logically laid out and get released really short notice it would be better if I knew what was coming'* (Noah, UG, Y3). Existing research highlights that having access to learning materials at least 24 hours in advance of a teaching session is an important reasonable adjustment for autistic and other neurodivergent students for both online and in-person learning (Clouder et al., 2020). Existing research has also identified several challenges with online learning materials including visual and text distractions such as spelling errors and typos, cluttered/busy pages, and visuals with unclear thematic relevance (Adams et al., 2019). Participants also found that online learning made it difficult to focus, and absorbing and retaining taught material was more difficult online than in person: *'Online learning*

takes out the absorbance of information for me personally' (Devan, ND); 'I was never able to maintain focus during online lectures and seminars' (Kate, UG, Y2). This could be because online learning requires several skills that many autistic students have been shown to struggle with, such as time management, organisation and planning (e.g. Adams et al., 2019).

Participants found online seminars particularly difficult; attempting to navigate social rules online was tricky for participants like Charlie (MSc, Y2): 'I wish there were more clear rules about when to talk etc. I think I butt in and talk over people but I don't notice at the time and feel bad after'. Trying to navigate this new online mode of learning led to disengagement with seminars altogether for several participants: 'It's confusing and pressured, no one talks and it's too easy just to skip it' (Harriet, UG, Y3). So, for those who found online learning did not work for them, engagement decreased, which is not conducive to academic success (Ketonen et al., 2016). Support for these students could mediate this, but many participants reported not accessing, being offered or knowing what support was available to them, a problem echoed in previous research (Gelbar et al., 2014).

Returning to campus brings so many challenges

Experiences of autistic students attending university campuses has been well documented in previous research (Gurbuz et al., 2019; Madriaga, 2010). University campuses are spaces in which autistic students are particularly at risk of sensory overload (Mulder & Cashin, 2014) because of many distractions such as noise and crowds (Gurbuz et al., 2019). Participants' reports of the return to campus after lockdown showed this continues to be the case, especially after being away from campus and other busy spaces for so long.

Returning to campus primarily meant two things: the potential for sensory overload

and the need for masking. These are both challenging for autistic students and added to the stressors of university life. Participants reported being particularly affected by the sensory information processing differences associated with autism on campus: 'worry about lighting or temperature or background noise that I can't control' (Charlie, MSc, Y3); 'Anxiety literally takes over and focusing on the minute details of noise and feet shuffling and people talking on the phone can sometimes almost paralyse you' (Kate, UG, Y2). Sensory overload can be debilitating and distracting, making it difficult to concentrate on material being taught. As a result, participants were afraid to return to campus – 'Scared. I like being at home' (Sandra, UG, Y1); 'terrified:' (Alex, UG Y2) – and when they did return, there was often a lengthy process of adjustment:

'The main issues I had was transitioning back and the high anxiety of going back into groups of people (...) This lasted for most of semester 1 2021/2022, the first semester I had anything in campus. However, now I have adjusted and refamiliarised myself with it I am liking the blended learning approach.' (Harriet, UG, Y3).

Masking is when an autistic person consciously or unconsciously uses strategies either to hide their autistic differences or find alternative ways to face something they struggle with (Sedgewick et al., 2022). Masking often happens when engaging in social interactions and when experiencing sensory overwhelm (Pearson & Rose, 2021), a feeling of being overwhelmed or overloaded by sensory input as a result of hypersensitivity to such input (MacLennan et al., 2022). After spending so much time at home and for so long, likely with little or no need to mask, masking was an essential part of participants' return to campus, and they did not feel they could be themselves away from their home environment: 'I try to act as neurotypical as possible' (Harriet, UG, Y3); 'worry about my breathing, my facial expressions' (Sandra,

UG, Y3). Furthermore, Avery (UG, Y2) compared learning at home and in lecture rooms, implying they would be masking if they were in the lecture room and that they would not be masking at home: *'whereas I do not think I would have that freedom in a lecture room. I am able to do my own thing without worrying about people watching me, and feeling judged'*. It is evident that the participants felt that there would be negative reactions from other members of the university community to their unmasked self, suggesting they are conscious of continued stigma around autism (see Botha et al., 2022).

Campus, like other public and social domains, is a place where autistic students mask to fit in or not be noticed as different (Sedgewick et al., 2022). This masking led to problems for the participants because of the need to rest afterwards: *'All of these things absolutely exhaust me. I then need to retreat, recharge'* (Kate, UG, Y2); *'but then I go home and I am completely exhausted, both physically and mentally, and I don't think people realise that'* (Dave, UG, Y3). Prolonged masking can even lead to autistic burnout – a response to long-term and unresolved stress, where individuals reach their limit emotionally and physically (Sedgewick et al., 2022) – and is associated with increased mental health problems (Miller et al., 2021; Scott & Sedgewick, 2021), including risk of suicide in autistic adults (Pelton et al., 2020). Having to make time for, and suffer through, the consequences of masking because of attending university could not only have effects on learning and academic achievement, but also on mental health. For many autistic people, not just students, masking is life (Miller et al., 2021), but it is not without the aforementioned costs. This raises questions about what universities can do to reduce the need for masking on campus to make it a less stressful place for autistic students.

Conclusions

Unsurprisingly perhaps, the present study showed that changes caused by the pandemic had impacts on autistic students'

perceived learning, engagement with their studies and academic performance. However, these impacts were varied, online learning was an improvement for some, but not for others. Themes developed in this study reiterate the diversity of autistic students' experiences evident in existing research (e.g. Anderson et al., 2018). However, in many existing studies, only a minority report a positive experience of university (e.g. Barkas et al., 2020), whereas, in the current study, the pandemic's imposition of home learning seemed to have benefitted many. Online learning reduced the sensory challenges of attending campus, provided students with more freedom to behave as their authentic self and gave them more control over their time and studies. Thus, online learning is an important reasonable adjustment to increase accessibility for some autistic students, as part of an individualised and holistic support package (MacLeod & Green, 2009). To mediate the challenges some autistic students faced with online learning, such as time management and navigating the online learning environment, the current study highlights the importance of teaching the skills needed to succeed and careful design of the learning environment and content (Adams et al., 2019). The current study also highlighted the reduced opportunities for communication with staff, and in-person interaction, associated with online learning, which meant that students could completely disengage with their studies for prolonged periods without anyone necessarily noticing or contacting them. This highlights the need to monitor students' engagement with online learning and to actively reach out, using a variety of communication channels (Dwyer et al., 2022), if students are disengaged for prolonged periods.

The study reiterated the sensory challenges associated with attending university campuses that has been a recurring

theme in previous literature (Anderson et al., 2017; Gurbuz et al., 2019), indicating that universities still have much work to do in this area. Research and consultation with autistic students is necessary because some measures, despite their well-intended nature, can be experienced as isolating by some (Madriaga, 2010). From listening to voices of autistic students in this study, we support existing recommendations for the creation of sensory rooms or quiet spaces on university campuses that they can use when feeling overwhelmed by sensory information or need to take a break from masking (Sarrett, 2018).

It is striking that there is a continued need for more awareness and acceptance of autism in university communities; the silence around autism needs to be broken to reduce stigma and promote acceptance. Recommendations for ways this could be achieved are training for university staff, both academic and support staff, and providing education to all students about autism (Madriaga, 2010). Such training will help staff to implement ways of teaching and supporting students that are more inclusive and accessible, and create more acceptance of things like stimming (self-stimulatory behaviours such as flapping hands, humming or rocking back and forth; Sarrett, 2018), and hopefully reduce the pressure autistic people feel to mask their autism, thus reducing the harmful impact masking can have.

Finally, turning to the limitations of this study, it was led by a non-autistic researcher, albeit one who identified as an 'informed outsider' (Scott & Sedgwick, 2021), and although attempts were made to consult autistic people in the design of the survey via the feedback mentioned above,

the research could have been improved by collaboration or consultation with autistic people as part of the design. Feedback from autistic recruitment contacts suggested there were too many questions in the initial version of the online survey, though actions were taken to change this by developing a shorter survey; the survey could have been shorter from the outset, which may have benefitted recruitment. Feedback also included the suggestion to use voice notes as a response mode because filling in lengthy surveys online could be challenging for some autistic students (on top of all the writing required for their degree course). Although this was investigated, it was not possible to identify a way for participants to submit voice notes that was GDPR compliant within the time constraints of the study. In future, it is important to design research with autistic students that offers multiple modalities of response, for instance, an online survey and video-call, telephone, email and instant messenger interviews could all be offered to allow the participant to choose the best way for them to participate in the research (Aidley & Fearon, 2021). Looking forward, as many universities continue to provide blended learning to students, there is abundant opportunity to extend understandings of autistic students' experiences of online learning.

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Empirical article

Eating Disorder blogs during Covid-19: A window into recovery progress

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During times of crisis, those who are in recovery from pre-existing conditions such as eating disorders can be at increased risk for exacerbation of existing illnesses and other comorbid conditions. 37 blogs focused on eating disorder recovery were identified via internet searches (Google search, National Eating Disorder Association, HealthLine, and Psychology Today) and reviewed by the research team. Nine blogs with posts spanning November 2019 to June 2020 were chosen, using set inclusion/exclusion criteria of posts written prior to and during the Covid-19 pandemic, for thematic analysis. Persons who identified as being in recovery from eating disorders experienced many of the same stressors as the general population, but these were influenced by the nuances of their illness. Food scarcities led to anxiety and a focus on searching grocery stores to obtain provisions. Lockdown impacted the emotional status of bloggers by distancing them from their support networks and their treatment teams. Loss of support systems, including family and virtual communities, left bloggers feeling isolated. Persons struggling with eating disorders, attempting to overcome their illness but less stable in their recovery in the pre-Covid period tended not to improve during the Covid-19 period, and in some cases experienced increasing symptoms or complete relapse, a loss of motivation, and a sense of despair that can impact recovery status.

Keywords: Eating disorder; Covid-19; Eating disorder recovery; Blogs.

Introduction

THE global outbreak of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (Sars-COV-2) led to the Coronavirus Disease (Covid-19) pandemic (Huang et al., 2020), causing massive disruption to livelihoods. The pandemic has caused significant changes to everyday life, including physical illness and emotional distress (Cao et al., 2020; Cullen et al., 2020; Dubey et al., 2020; Huang & Zhao, 2020; Li et al., 2020; Sher, 2020), leading to a global decline in mental health (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020; Vindegaard & Benros, 2020) and increased mental health crises (Cullen et al., 2020; Minihan et al., 2020; Sher, 2020; Wang et al., 2020). A Swiss study found that anxiety related to Covid-19, isolation, and reduced social

interaction were connected with mental health decline, especially in female individuals (Elmer et al., 2020). This relates to our study because the blogs were composed by female writers and they appeared most impacted by the social isolation connected to Covid-19.

Social changes and isolation, fear of disease, grief, and financial strain are just a few of the reported consequences from the pandemic (Dubey et al., 2020; Guessoum et al., 2020; McGinty et al., 2020), with experts speculating that such stress may cause both long- and short-term psychological struggles. Those with existing psychological illnesses may be disproportionately affected, both immediately and in the long term, as they are

already struggling to cope (Chatterjee et al., 2020; McGinty et al., 2020).

Eating disorders are mental health disorders with increasing incidence among young populations (Klump et al., 2009; Mitrofan et al., 2019), and those with eating disorders have varying experiences and coping skills. The Covid-19 pandemic may spur development of disordered eating or exacerbate symptoms in a variety of ways (Rodgers et al., 2020), including restrictions and disruptions to activities of daily life (Rodgers et al., 2020), decreased social support (Rodgers et al., 2020; Touyz et al., 2020), restructured healthcare services (Davis et al., 2020), increased exposure to social media and appearance of eating related media messages (Rodgers et al., 2020), and fear of disease and compensatory restrictive behaviors (Rodgers et al., 2020). During times of instability, individuals with eating disorders, like others with preexisting mental health conditions, can experience increased symptoms as a result of loneliness or isolation (Levine, 2012) and are often on 'high-alert' for potential threats (Levine, 2007).

Based on our clinical experience, change, in general, can feel like a threat to individuals struggling with eating disorders. Complete upending of social interactions, including stay at home orders and virtual interactions, as experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic, can have a significant impact on individuals struggling with eating disorders. These individuals may be at greater risk for illness exacerbation (Phillipou et al., 2020; Rodgers et al., 2020; Shah et al., 2020; Termorshuizen et al., 2020) and psychological distress as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic (Termorshuizen et al., 2020).

Blogs are online documents that often serve as journals. They can provide a unique view into an individual's personal narrative, behaviour, and emotional state. As such, blogs serve as valuable tools in monitoring public perspective and experience in regard to various events (Tausczik et al., 2012), and

may serve as a window into the experience of individuals in recovery from an eating disorder (Kenny et al., 2019) in regard to specific events or times. Previous studies have analysed blogs and other writings to investigate responses to crises, including public health crises such as the H1N1 outbreak (Tausczik et al., 2012); however, there are few studies evaluating the ways by which the experience of those recovering from eating disorders are affected by significant events. As the Covid-19 pandemic has introduced numerous psychological stressors, it is of great importance to analyse the effect of the pandemic on this vulnerable population.

In this study, we analyse the longitudinal content of online blog posts to better understand the ways by which the Covid-19 crisis has impacted those in recovery from eating disorders. The goal is to understand the impact of Covid-19 and the subsequent quarantine on individuals who are struggling with or have struggled with eating disorders. While the pandemic has had an impact on everyone, research has clearly demonstrated that individuals struggling with psychological disease are more adversely affected. Young women, even those without clear psychiatric illnesses, have experienced an increase in anxiety related to Covid-19. What does this mean for young women who struggle with eating disorders? This group often struggles with loneliness even when they are not forced into quarantine. Many treatment centres for eating disorders include day programmes and group activities. These have been restricted because of the pandemic and quarantine, which increases isolation. Change is also a stressor for individuals who struggle with eating disorders and Covid-19 clearly changed life in many ways. Individuals were confined to their homes, isolated from their supports and treatment community, and alone with their eating disorder thoughts. By using blogs, we can hear directly from individuals, in their own words, of how they were dealing with their eating disorders and recovery before and during the pandemic.

Method

The goal of this study was to describe the response to Covid-19 of people with eating disorders via online eating disorder recovery-focused blogs. This study is qualitative in nature, and explores themes present in eating disorder recovery-focused blogs before and during the pandemic. This United States-based study seeks to evaluate patterns and themes within the data collected; as such a thematic analysis was used. After receiving Institutional Review Board (ethical) approval, a search for blogs focused on eating disorder recovery was conducted via Google and online resources including the National Eating Disorder Association, HealthLine, and Psychology Today. Blogs were preliminarily reviewed for eligibility using the inclusion criteria:

1. Public access and not associated with any 'closed groups', such as those on Facebook or other social media sites;
2. Bloggers self-identified as currently having an eating disorder or having had an eating disorder;
3. Blogs that appeared under the search terms 'eating disorder blogs' and 'eating disorder recovery blogs';
4. Written in English;
5. Not specifically associated with treatment centres/programmes, i.e. staff were not blogging;
6. Posts written between November 2019 – June 2020, with at least one post November 2019 – February 2020, and at least one post March 2020 – June 2020;
7. Blogs were included regardless of whether bloggers shared their names or other identifying information. For analysis, identifying information was redacted from blog transcripts.

Only blog posts written by the blog owner on their individual blogs were considered for this study. These criteria were selected because the authors aimed to examine the effects the pandemic had on recovery. Some individuals with eating disorders focused on

how to sustain the illness (pro-ana or pro-mia blogs). These blogs were not included; instead recovery-focused blogs were used. In addition, some blogs are promoted by recovery centres as a way to educate or engage potential clients. The authors wanted to analyse the words of the individuals themselves as they outlined the struggles with recovery before and during the pandemic, so as to evaluate themes within bloggers' lived experience and stability in recovery.

37 potential blogs were retrieved from the initial search, and nine were included in the final study. Blogs were most commonly excluded due to lack of posts in the designated time frame (20 blogs), relationship to a treatment centre or personal business related to eating disorder treatment (two blogs), posts that were image only with no text, blogs not focused on eating disorder recovery (two blogs), and blog posts that were written only in response to questions posed by readers. Of note, some blogs were excluded for multiple reasons.

Transcripts of all entries from blogs that met the inclusion criteria were created. Entries from March – June 2020 were considered to be 'during-Covid' while those from November 2019 – February 2020 were 'pre-Covid'.

Text from the posts falling in these timeframes was extracted, de-identified, and converted to Microsoft Word format. Copies of the transcripts were reviewed independently by each member of the research team (EB, CD, MPL) in order to identify recurring words, phrases, themes, and concepts in the text. Once all members had reviewed the transcript, the team met to compare results and come to a consensus. Themes, subthemes, and general blog tone were identified by team members and evaluated in aggregate and themes from the 'during-Covid' period of March 2020 – June 2020 were compared to posts from the 'pre-Covid' period of November 2019 – February 2020.

In addition to identifying themes, criteria were established by the research team to classify blogs according to:

1. Overall tone
 - a. Positive, negative or mixed

2. Recovery status
 - a. Stable (blog shows evidence of other interests, content of blog is not solely focused on eating disorder, statements evidencing recovery i.e. *'I have been recovered for X years'*)
 - b. Mixed (evidence of some stability, i.e. not in inpatient or acute care, evidence of recovery including working, healthy relationships with others, expressing hope and belief in recovery)
 - c. Unstable (writing focused solely on eating disorder, admits to struggling, seeking or using inpatient or other acute care)
3. General
 - a. Covid-specific themes (isolation, food availability, treatment centre closures and changes to eating disorder treatment, and family dynamics and support)
 - b. Subthemes

In addition to identifying the themes in the blogs, the authors established these criteria to examine the overall recovery trajectory of individuals with eating disorders as they dealt with the pandemic. The authors wondered if there would be a larger effect on individuals who seemed stable in their recovery compared to those who were struggling even before quarantine. The classifications were designated based on clinical experience. Through our clinical work in the field of eating disorders, we defined these categories. Individuals who were secure in their recovery (stable), some very recovery-focused but struggling at times (mixed), and others clearly unstable

and entrenched in the use of their symptoms (unstable). The authors also examined if the tone of the blog influenced themes or change with recovery status.

As online blogs are published in an open-access manner on the internet, it is assumed that bloggers are aware that the information they shared was public and available for viewing by any internet user. As the blog posts have been de-identified both in our analysis and in the current manuscript, and as the information used is public in nature, there is minimal risk for loss of confidentiality.

Results

The number of individual blog entries ('posts') for each blog in the pre-Covid period ranged from 39 posts (Blog A) to one post (Blogs B, D, E). The number of posts for each blog in the during-Covid period ranged from 40 (Blog A) to two (Blog B). Table 1 displays the number of posts, recovery status, subthemes, and tone in the pre-Covid and during-Covid periods.

In regard to recovery status, three blogs (A, D, E) were stable in both the pre-Covid period and the during-Covid period. One blog (G) was stable in the pre-Covid period and was unstable in the during-Covid period. Two blogs (B, F) were mixed in both the pre-Covid period and the during-Covid period. One blog (C) was unstable in the pre-Covid period and mixed in the during-Covid period. Two blogs (H, I) were unstable in both the pre-Covid period and during-Covid period, with blog I being completely relapsed in the during-Covid period.

Table 1: De-identified blog characteristics for the pre-Covid and during-Covid periods.

Blog ID	Pre-Covid (1 st November 2019 – 30 th April 2020)				During-Covid (1 st March 2020 – 30 th June 2020)			
	Number of posts	Recovery Status	Subthemes	Tone	Number of posts	Recovery Status	Tone	Subthemes
A	39	Stable	Religion; more to life than an-orexia; blog as a 'brand'	Positive	40	Stable	Positive	Uncertainty; empowerment; family dynamics
B	1	Mixed	Body image issues; people pleasing; clothes as a security blanket	Positive	2	Mixed	Positive	Productivity during quarantine; reflection on pre-Covid travel; family death during Covid; weight gain; body image struggles
C	9	Unstable	Inpatient treatment; triggers; pursuing recovery for others rather than self; re-connecting with self	Positive	3	Mixed	Negative	Treatment during Covid; trying to stay positive; food scarcity; hard to find positives; hospital closed due to Covid; planned challenges with cooking pasta, couldn't find due to stockpiling
D	1	Stable	Patriarchal aspect of AA; helpful GI doctor; past treatment- both helpful and not helpful	Negative-positive toward recovery but negative toward attitudes author has encountered	3	Stable	Negative	GI problems following ED; quitting therapy; fatphobia

Table 1: De-identified blog characteristics for the pre-Covid and during-Covid periods. (continued)

Blog ID	Pre-Covid (1 st November 2019 – 30 th April 2020)				During-Covid (1 st March 2020 – 30 th June 2020)			
	Number of posts	Recovery Status	Subthemes	Tone	Number of posts	Recovery Status	Tone	Subthemes
E	1	Stable	Reflection on recovery, mid-recovery being the hardest; safe zone/ recovery phase	Positive	3	Stable	Positive	Definition of anorexia; focus on religion and God
F	3	Mixed	Acute grief due to miscarriage	Mixed	3	Mixed	Negative	What to do during a lockdown, isolation
G	3	Stable	The power of weight	Positive	3	Unstable	Negative	Relapse during Covid; loss of control
H	19	Unstable	Goals for the new year; inpatient treatment	Negative	19	Unstable	Negative	Recovery; journey toward target weight; isolation
I	12	Unstable	Weigh in	Negative	6	Unstable/completely relapsed	Negative	Relapse; re-gaining control

Table 2: Blogger recovery status and blog tone for the pre-Covid and during-Covid periods.

	Pre-Covid (1st November 2019 – 30th April 2020)			During-Covid (1st March 2020 – 30th June 2020)		
Blog ID	Recovery Status	Tone	Exemplar Statement	Recovery Status	Tone	Exemplar Statement
A	Stable	Positive	<i>'This year has been a bit of a revolution for me personally. I was thinking about it, and as the young girl in the midst of her anorexia, I would have never dreamed it would be possible to be where I am today... not just physically and mentally healthy, but specifically – having the courage to open my heart to others.'</i>	Stable	Positive	<i>'But I've gotta say...as of 36 hours in... I am practically climbing the walls of my 500 square foot Manhattan apartment. SO –I thought that tonight I'd share some tips for staying mentally healthy when in social distance mode. Because let's be honest: being cooped up is not good for the soul.'</i>
B	Mixed	Positive	<i>'If there's anything I've really learned – it's that I can't keep telling people what they want to hear and not expect it to backfire in my face in miraculous ways.'</i>	Mixed	Positive	<i>'Quarantine has given all of us a lot of time, right? And with that time it's a blessing and a curse. A blessing because I've been invested time into doing stuff that sparks my curiosity and learning: making walnut milk, growing a garden, playing piano, farming, etc., And also in that same sentence: loads of time to criticise shit I don't like about my body. Side angle of a mirror: jeez, look at the brown spots on my aging face.'</i>
C	Unstable	Positive	<i>'I have lots of doubts but a decent amount of hope, so I'm running with that.'</i>	Mixed	Negative	<i>'I have challenged a lot over the last month... However, given the events at the moment the hospital has had to close, and I am back home in Kent for the foreseeable future.'</i>

Table 2: Blogger recovery status and blog tone for the pre-Covid and during-Covid periods. (continued)

	Pre-Covid (1st November 2019 – 30th April 2020)			During-Covid (1st March 2020 – 30th June 2020)		
Blog ID	Recovery Status	Tone	Exemplar Statement	Recovery Status	Tone	Exemplar Statement
D	Stable	Negative-positive toward recovery but negative toward attitudes author has encountered	<i>'Now, I know that this individual's use and interpretation of Rule 62-like the fallible interpretations of a lot of things in AA and other anonymous groups-speak to the person, not to the fellowship as a whole, hence, the fourth tradition. Hell, Rule 62 was created so that a bunch of people who created a plan and failed, like any human might do, could laugh at themselves and not be bummed that they hadn't succeeded. We all need a little of that in our lives, certainly.'</i>	Stable	Negative	<i>'Especially when it comes to eating disorder recovery and other specific diagnoses within the mental health field, you have to know what to ask for. I am no longer afraid to ask potential therapists what their experience is in eating disordered behavior and treatment, and whether or not their approach involves HAES.'</i>
E	Stable	Positive	<i>"You're content with your progress and afraid to move ahead. Actually, you don't want to move ahead at all. You'd rather say here, where it's 'safe.'"</i>	Stable	Positive	<i>'This isn't easy, and I know it's especially difficult for those struggling with bad thoughts. It's times like these that can trigger a relapse.'</i>
F	Mixed	Mixed	<i>'...a mental health professional told me that due to just having the miscarriage a week beforehand I should be self-harming and portrayed it to be a bad thing that I wasn't; this then triggered me to start self-harming again, which was a big mistake.'</i>	Mixed	Negative	<i>'Right now I'm in a semi-okay mindset; I can see my struggles and trying my hardest to manage them the best I can... Being left with no support has been hard for me...'</i>

Table 2: Blogger recovery status and blog tone for the pre-Covid and during-Covid periods. (continued)

Blog ID	Pre-Covid (1st November 2019 – 30th April 2020)			During-Covid (1st March 2020 – 30th June 2020)		
	Recovery Status	Tone	Exemplar Statement	Recovery Status	Tone	Exemplar Statement
G	Stable	Positive	'I may not like my weight or my size, but I must focus on the more important, positive aspects of my life that mean so much to me and that bring true happiness. I am not giving 2kgs the power to control my life.'	Unstable	Negative	'For me? Welcome back anorexia. You had become so much quieter and I was making good progress with my recovery. But when faced with the extreme stress and anxiety over Corona and lockdown, you have leapt back into my life.'
H	Unstable	Negative	'Last week I was a full time [nurse]. This week I am a full time anorexic.'	Unstable	Negative	'Last Monday I turned up as normal, got weighed as normal. We had breakfast with our tables split up, sat two metres apart from each other. We couldn't access the lounge, instead sitting in the group room, two chairs between each of us.'
I	Unstable	Negative	'Recovery wise, I have a long way to go. I've left it a while between blog posts because I was starting to beat myself up writing that I've started refeeding – only to start restricting again – then refeeding. Still falling deeper into anorexia.'	Unstable/ completely relapsed	Negative	'I had been avoiding contact with mental health services because for the last few weeks I was in relapse, restricting to silly low calories in a bid to gain control over the situation the world is in right now.'

Analysis

Common Covid-specific themes that were identified are described in detail below. The themes were identified by the authors and the included quotes provide a connection with the actual emotional states of the individuals. In addition, exemplar statements are located in Table 2. These statements demonstrated themes and/or recovery states between pre-Covid and during-Covid.

Loss of support and therapy due to institutional shutdowns

In the pre-Covid period, bloggers wrote about their treatment programmes through a different lens, with some discussing it as a positive step, and others disclosing disappointment over needing formal therapy, but resolving to avoid disordered behaviours. These quotes demonstrate the reliance that these individuals had on treatment programmes, which they then lost during Covid-19.

One blogger was optimistic and wrote:

‘Good new [sic] though – I’m officially starting the day patient treatment...’

And:

‘I am trying to be open and honest with the staff about my main fears.’ (C)

Another blogger said:

‘Just a week ago, I could have been speaking colleague to colleague to the staff at the clinic; making referrals into the service and arranging transfers of care. Now I strip to my underwear in front of them, standing exposed on a scale, overwhelmed with feelings of wanting my weight to go both up and down simultaneously. Anorexia feeling furious when it increases, feeling defeated if it falls.’ (H)

And:

‘In 2020, I am dedicated to ending my other compensatory behaviours and giving over my

scales to my boyfriend. I get weighed twice a week at the clinic as it is, and their scales are different to mine anyway. All it does it cause me more anxiety than is necessary and I need to detach myself from that number.’ (H)

During the Covid phase, two bloggers discussed the effects of quarantine on their treatment regimens and availability of resources within their treatment programmes, including hospital closures. Bloggers described these changes as impacting their environments, both forcing them to return home due to hospital closures, and facing new challenges in being physically separated from peers during treatment, leaving them without the therapeutic interactions they had grown used to during their treatment. They also demonstrated turning to eating disorder symptoms as a way to try and take control in an out-of-control pandemic. For example:

‘I have challenged a lot over the last month... However, given the events at the moment the hospital has had to close, and I am back home in Kent for the foreseeable future.’ (C).

Another noted:

‘Last Monday I turned up as normal, got weighed as normal. We had breakfast with our tables split up, sat two metres apart from each other. We couldn’t access the lounge, instead sitting in the group room, two chairs between each of us.’ (H)

A third individual wrote:

‘I had been avoiding contact with mental health services because for the last few weeks I was in relapse, restricting to silly low calories in a bid to gain control over the situation the world is in right now.’ (I).

More isolated than most

Prior to the beginning of quarantine, some bloggers participated in activities and had

interests outside of their treatment and had social and family supports available. One blogger described her eating disorder as only one part of her identity, writing about other important experiences including romantic relationships, staying up late, and watching sunrises. Another blogger detailed their pursuit of happiness beyond her weight, focusing instead on positive aspects in their life.

Bloggers described in detail the unique impact of isolation on their mental health and recovery status. Several bloggers described how quarantine and isolation diminished their ability to interact socially with friends or other supports, leading to discouragement and, in some cases, a return to disordered eating as a coping mechanism. Others described that isolation led to more self-criticism and focused on negatively viewed aspects of themselves.

One blogger described working through her struggles despite being left with no support, a situation that introduced significant challenge to her recovery:

'Right now I'm in a semi-okay mindset; I can see my struggles and trying my hardest to manage them the best I can... Being left with no support has been hard for me...' (F).

Another writer described spending their time in quarantine engaging in enriching activities such as making walnut milk, growing a garden, and playing the piano, while simultaneously struggling to avoid criticising their body. This dichotomy introduced challenges to bloggers in managing time alone in quarantine and staying engaged in their recovery. When quarantining was enacted, some bloggers felt as though they were not able to care for themselves alone or recognised that isolation might be difficult or even inspire relapse:

'This isn't easy, and I know it's especially difficult for those struggling with bad thoughts. It's times like these that can trigger a relapse.' (E).

As well as:

'And for the first two weeks of self-quarantine I was basically a big puddle of self-pitying and glazed eyes. I did very little for myself.' (B).

One blogger described the stress associated with the pandemic caused her to completely relapse. Prior to the start of the pandemic, this blogger appeared to be in a stable condition but with isolation and quarantine came deteriorating health:

'For me? Welcome back anorexia. You had become so much quieter and I was making good progress with my recovery. But when faced with the extreme stress and anxiety over Corona and lockdown, you have leapt back into my life.' (G)

Interestingly, a blogger (A) who appeared to have a high level of stability in their recovery detailed their experience with isolation in a different way, describing their experience needing to stay in their apartment as *'not good for the soul'*, but not commenting on increased negative feelings about themselves or potential relapse. Rather, this blogger expressed gratitude that they were not in the throes of anorexia during the quarantine period and shared ideas for staying *'mentally healthy'* during the quarantine period. This blogger was able to maintain a high level of stability in their recovery both during the pre-Covid time period and in the during-Covid period.

Nurturing the physical self

Discussion of food availability varied in the pre-Covid period posts vs during-Covid period posts. Pre-Covid, a blogger discussed food challenges without concern as to whether they would be able to obtain the food required:

'I went for lunch and for the first time I finished it and didn't go too far over the time limit. And I had Mini Cheddars for the first time in YEARS which I was really proud of myself for.' (C).

However, during the Covid period, the blogger wrote of scarcity in obtaining food items due to stockpiling, describing the frustration this experience caused them. Given uncertainty in obtaining food items during the Covid period, some bloggers experienced increased stress regarding cooking and meal planning:

'Oh and I challenged my fear of cooking pasta! On Thursday it was my turn to cook a hot lunch so I decided to take the opportunity to use staff support to cook pasta. Problem? Some arseholes are stockpiling and I can't find pasta for love nor money. So my friend helped out and brought in her... special pasta.' (C)

Mixed support: Family and virtual influences

In the pre-Covid period, some bloggers described feeling as though their family support had waned once they hit a certain stage of recovery. One blogger described feeling as though her family members did not notice her illness as much as they had during the early stages of recovery:

'In my opinion, the mid-recovery phase is the hardest. You don't look hungry anymore, so everyone assumes you're fine. Friends quit checking in on you, and parents loosen up around food. Mom isn't very attentive at meal-times, and dad doesn't seem to notice that you're hiding in the bedroom to exercise.' (E)

Bloggers included in this study had a variety of experiences regarding family dynamics and support. One blogger discussed the difficulty of her grandfather's death and the inability to have a funeral for him due to family separation and travel restrictions because of Covid-19:

'Most of all, my grandfather could not have a proper burial and his death will continue to hang over my family until we can all be together.' (B)

Another blogger, who appeared to be stable in her recovery, described communication with

family and friends as vital to her quarantine experience, and found support through virtual communication methods.

'Communication has been such a vital aspect of my survival during this quarantine. And those people who have really shown up when the chips are down, and made their presence known through daily FaceTimes and frequent phone calls – it communicates so much more than just those 10 or 15 minutes of chatting. And conversely, the opposite communicates a clear message, too.' (A)

Discussion

The aim of this study was to describe the lived experience of people in recovery from eating disorders before and during Covid, using online blogs as a source of data. The effects of the Covid-19 pandemic have been widely reported to be detrimental to mental health, with those with pre-existing mental health conditions more vulnerable (Cullen et al., 2020; Hossain et al., 2020; Marques de Miranda et al., 2020; Pfefferbaum & North, 2020). Rodgers et al. (2020) has described the ways by which the Covid-19 pandemic may spur disordered eating behaviours in at-risk individuals and exacerbate behaviours and symptoms in those with existing eating disorders. Experiences contributing to worsening symptoms includes disruptions to daily activities including recreational activities, exposure to anxiety-inducing media, including social media, and fear of falling ill (Rodgers et al., 2020). The blogs included in this study demonstrated themes consistent with these experiences, including isolation due to social distancing, disruption to daily activities, and uncertainty surrounding the future in the face of Covid-19.

Blogs reviewed in this study showed interesting trends in terms of stability throughout the Covid-19 period. In regard to recovery status, blogs A, D, and E remained stable in both the pre-Covid period and the during-Covid period, while blog G was stable in the pre-Covid period and was unstable

in the during-Covid period. Blogs H and I were unstable in both the pre-Covid period and during-Covid period, with blog I being completely relapsed in the during-Covid period. Blog C was unstable in the pre-Covid period and mixed in the during-Covid period. Within the sample considered in this study, bloggers who were less stable in their recovery prior to Covid tended to not improve during the Covid period, and in some cases got worse or completely relapsed. Individuals who were on a more secure trajectory in their recovery prior to Covid-19 experienced a bit of variability in the during-Covid period, with some bloggers remaining stable while another became unstable during this period. This result is consistent with data presented by Baenas et al. (2020), who reported that approximately 25% of people with eating disorders experienced symptomatic deterioration during Covid-19 confinement, and with Schlegl et al. (2020), who found that many patients with eating disorders reported worsening of symptoms during the pandemic.

Key Covid-related themes discussed within our sample included the difficulty in obtaining treatment and preferred foods, isolation, the influence of novel forms of information and support, such as FaceTime, and changes in treatment. Bloggers had unique experiences within these themes, including living alone in a small apartment, lacking social support, and being unable to find the food products available to participate in aspects of treatment, such as food challenges. Many had disruptions or changes to treatment, including social distancing during treatment and hospital closures. For some, these changes likely contributed to changes in recovery status and an increase in symptoms. With significant time alone in isolation, some bloggers, including blogger B, spent time engaging in body checking or otherwise analysing their body. The stress of the pandemic caused one blogger, G, to go from stable in their recovery to completely relapsed.

The effect of the pandemic on mental health cannot be understated, and the collective Covid-related trauma experienced by many may contribute to cumulative trauma and adversity. The understanding of how Covid-19 and the quarantine could exacerbate previous traumas and eating disorder symptoms is important for clinicians and families trying to support patients in recovery.

Lifetime adversity may include relationship stress, bereavement, social or environmental stress, personal or loved-one illness, or disaster, as described by Carstensen et al. (2020). During both the pre-Covid and during-Covid periods, Blogger F was in the midst of acute grief following a miscarriage and blogger B described her grandfather's death and inability to have a '*proper burial*', leading to a 'mixed' recovery status in both periods. Although no other blogger described similar past stressors or traumas in their writings, merely having a chronic illness may contribute to cumulative adversity (Alonzo, 2000). In light of Covid-related trauma, as well as illness-related trauma, and other personal traumas, the Covid-period likely contributed greatly to the cumulative trauma of these bloggers, with potential effect on eating disorder recovery outcome.

Understanding the effect of Covid-19 on eating disorders/recovery helps us understand important aspects to an individual's treatment. The treatment of eating disorders using groups and peer support has been a standard of care. Individuals who lost this support because of Covid-19 clearly describe the feelings of loneliness and isolation. They turned to eating disorders to try and gain back control. They fell into their negative thoughts when they were stranded in quarantine. As treatment has opened back up, we can engage our patients and once again emphasise the importance of interpersonal supports. We heard the challenge of trying to recover in isolation, and use this to try to encourage our patients to develop supports.

In addition, this study helps us recognise the cumulative trauma that individuals struggling with mental illness, and specifically eating disorders, faced during the pandemic. As we help individuals return to their recovery, acknowledging the challenges and isolation that they have faced will be vital. We cannot dismiss their loneliness and isolation as they reconnect to care. We need to understand the pressures that led to an increase in eating disorder symptoms. The voices from these blogs take us into the lives of these individuals as they worked to recover from their eating disorders, and then found themselves trying to make it through the pandemic. At that point, many were trying to just survive if they could not thrive.

Strengths and limitations

A strength of this study is the evaluation of bloggers' lived experiences described in their own words. Using blogs, which can often serve as online diaries, allowed for a unique view into each writer's recovery journey during the pandemic. Furthermore, using blogs with posts written prior to the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in addition to posts during the pandemic, allowed for a longitudinal analysis of blogger experiences during the study period.

Blogs included in this study were obtained via internet search for 'eating disorder blogs' and 'eating disorder recovery blogs' and via online resources including the National Eating Disorder Association, HealthLine, and Psychology Today. Information regarding the type of eating disorder each blogger had was not analysed in this study, nor was their diagnosis verified. Further, bloggers detailed other aspects of their lives outside of their eating disorder, including information on their occupations, romantic relationships, and parenting which were not analysed. Although this variety allowed for a deeper look into the bloggers' stability in terms of recovery, it is possible that this characteristic diluted information

or disclosure regarding their recovery status or personal narrative regarding their eating disorder. Additionally, various geographic regions and communities experienced 'shut-down' due to the pandemic at different times and to different degrees, in the United States, potentially influencing the type of Covid-19 experience different bloggers had, and therefore potentially affecting eating disorder recovery differently.

Finally, we were limited in terms of our blog collection method. At the time of data collection, there was not a central database or list of blogs, and as such, blogs were collected via internet searches and short lists compiling eating disorder blogs

Conclusions

We conclude that bloggers who were attempting to overcome their eating disorder but less stable in their recovery in the pre-Covid period tended not to improve during the Covid period, and in some cases experienced increasing symptoms or complete relapse. Writers who were more secure in their recovery prior to Covid showed variability in the during-Covid period, with some remaining stable, while another became unstable during this period. Our study also supports other work in the field since the bloggers' own words supported identified challenges, such as changes in treatment, food availability, and the effect of isolation and exposure to triggering social media.

The current study may contribute to the greater understanding of eating disorder recovery in the setting of stressful life events, including the Covid-19 pandemic. Understanding the ways by which patients experience crises, and reviewing the discussion of these experiences online, may lead to richer understanding of the world-view of patients with eating disorders. Additionally, the virtual format may allow bloggers to share concerns, struggles and successes more openly with peers who were in similar situations. Leveraging available resources,

connecting patients with like-minded others, and appreciating the unique struggles created by Covid-19 are important strategies that can facilitate better, more informed, patient care.

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Student Spot

'The most important thing is that we actually work together towards our relationship.' An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis on how young women in couple relationships experience mental health and wellbeing

Madalina Groza

Young women's mental health is reported to be poorer, and it seems to be most affected by relationship quality in comparison to young men. This study explored the experiences of mental health and wellbeing in young women's couple relationships. The participants were five females, between 19 to 28 years old, and were in monogamous long-term heterosexual couple relationships. The data was collected via semi-structured interviews, which was later analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The findings demonstrate that couple relationships seemed to only have a positive impact on the participants' wellbeing if their investments within the relationship were reciprocated. These findings have the potential to aid support services by shedding light on the role that the quality of couple relationships play in young women's mental health and wellbeing.

Keywords: IPA; Qualitative research; Young women; Well-being; Couple relationships.

Introduction

ACCORDING to the Mental Health Foundation (2016) the most common mental disorders in the UK are Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD) with 5.9% of the population diagnosed; depression, with 3.3% of the population diagnosed; and phobias, with 2.4% of the population diagnosed. Considering gender, in a report by Newlove-Delgado et al. (2022) young women (17 to 24 years old) were nearly two and a half times more likely to be diagnosed with any of these mental illnesses (31.2%) compared to men (13.3%). Even though there is a prevalence of mental disorders in the UK, the World Health Organisation (2014) has defined mental health as going beyond the absence of mental disorders. They go further

on to define that having a high level of mental health is when one is able to work towards self-fulfilment and self-improvement, ability to contribute to society, and ability to deal with life's uncertainties in a healthy way. However, this definition may be regarded as being too positive. Galderisi et al. (2015) suggested a more inclusive definition for having a high level of mental health that takes into consideration the individual's reality (satisfactory or challenging) and that recognises cultural and societal differences in approaching mental health. The discrepancy in the definition of mental health highlights that more in-depth research needs to be conducted in order to acknowledge the context in which it is perceived.

Along with cultural and societal differences there are also individual factors, such as living circumstances, in understanding mental health. Arnett (2007) proposed 'emerging adulthood', a life stage that takes place between adolescence and adulthood, between ages 18 to 25. This period is characterised by freedom of making choices and exploring employment and education opportunities alongside romantic relationships. According to Arnett (2007), during this stage, mental health and self-esteem tend to improve in comparison to adolescence. However, due to life's uncertainties, some people might not cope well with this transition and thus their mental health degrades. This means that the life stage that one finds oneself in contributes to their mental wellbeing according to individual circumstances and perceptions. This illustrates the importance of taking into consideration the life stage that one is going through for a better understanding of mental health.

Regarding diverse cultural perspectives, Danto and Walsh (2017) investigated an aboriginal community that had been forced to relocate due to natural disasters. They were reported to have similar mental health and lower rates of suicide compared to people from western cultures. This was also found in other research (e.g. Kirmayer et al. 2003) and suggests that what is usually perceived as traumatic and could possibly lead to mental disorders in western cultures, is perceived differently in non-western cultures. Thus, mental health varies according to the context that one finds oneself in. The high levels of mental health found in aboriginal communities was linked with high community engagement, which sheds light into the importance of having close relationships.

The quality of close relationships can be understood from the context of attachment theory. Attachment refers to the quality of a bond between a child and their care giver (Ainsworth, 1978). Although attachment theory has been developed on the basis of infant attachment (Ainsworth, 1978; Bowlby,

1979), it has also been adapted to the study of couple relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). This is because attachment plays a big role in the quality of couple relationships depending on whether an individual has a secure or insecure attachment style.

Couple relationships are regulated by the dyad's interacting attachment patterns. Couple relationships are the most intense and adult human interaction that one can have (Wilson et al., 2009). The Relationships Alliance (2017) suggested that the link between couple relationships and mental health is bidirectional, in which both influence each other in complex ways. Braithwaite and Holt-Lunstad (2017) posit that couple relationships are at the heart of one's mental health through the experience model. According to this model, improving the quality of the couple relationship improves mental health, but improving mental health does not necessarily lead to better couple relationship quality. The experience model is supported by the Mental Health Foundation (2016) which states that people who are in committed relationships have lower levels of stress and depression compared to people who are single. Braithwaite and Holt-Lunstad (2017) further argue that having high mental health predicts future commitment in couple relationships, through the selection model. This model states that one's mental health might predict levels of involvement in couple relationships, as individuals who are mentally healthy better able to commit themselves to a partner. Therefore, mental health seems to contribute to the quality of the couple relationship, and the opposite is also possible.

Furthermore, a study investigating the link between couple relationships and mental health in college students concluded that individuals who were in committed relationships had better mental health than those who were single; this applied especially to females (Whitton et al., 2013). Following this, in a longitudinal study, Soller (2014) supported the view that couple relationships

affect females' mental health and wellbeing. The research investigated the role of relationship inauthenticity in teenagers, which refers to a relationship that does not follow one's ideal expectations. The main finding was that relationship inauthenticity affected females' psychological wellbeing while it did not seem to affect males in the same way. This suggests that there are gender differences in how couple relationships are perceived. Considering the gender disparity, Olson and Crosnoe (2017) found that romantic involvement in adolescence was associated with poorer mental health in females but not for males. Similar to Arnett (2007), the study further suggests that wellbeing increases in emerging adulthood. Therefore, relationship quality seems to play an important role in females' mental wellbeing while it does not appear to affect males in the same way. However, how the quality of the couple relationship affects young adult women specifically is still under-researched, as previous research mainly focuses on female teenagers' experiences.

Overall, it can be concluded that attachment influences couple relationships as well as mental health, and that mental health influences couple relationships in complex ways. In addition to this, there is a gender disparity in which young women seem to be the most affected by their relationship quality in comparison to young men. Taking this into account, the discussed studies do not explain why young women are the most affected by the couple relationship's quality. Considering that couple relationships and mental health experiences are high in complexity, they should be explored in depth, where young women's perspectives should be accounted for in order to understand how they make sense of their couple relationship in terms of their mental wellbeing. The present study aimed to investigate this, by asking the following research question: How do young women in couple relationships experience mental health and wellbeing?

Methodology

Study design

This study adopted a qualitative research design, with an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) focus because its aim was to explore in a more holistic manner the extent to which couple relationships influence young women's wellbeing and mental health. Young women's perspectives were considered to understand how they make sense of their couple relationship in terms of their mental wellbeing.

Participants and sampling

The sample consisted of five participants, and it was purposive. The inclusion criteria for participation in this study were: female; aged between 18 to 30 years; and being in a heterosexual relationship of at least 6 months. The sample was homogenous, meaning that participants were in long relationships (between four and a half years and nine years), they were university students; and they were young women with ages ranging 19-28. Three participants were in non-cohabiting relationships, while two were cohabiting with their partners.

Data collection and ethics

This project was granted full ethical approval by the Middlesex University Psychology Ethics Committee. Participants were recruited through posters which were placed around the campus. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews, and the questions focused on the experiences of their couple relationship, attachment behaviours, mental health and wellbeing. They ranged between 30 to 94 minutes and were audio-recorded.

Participants were provided with an information sheet which described what the interview entailed while written consent to be interviewed was also obtained. Participants were informed by these documents that they could withdraw their consent and data up to two weeks after their interview date, and that they could pause, stop or withdraw during

the interview at any point without giving a reason for doing so. At the end of the interview, participants were debriefed by the researcher, who explicitly explained where and how to contact relevant support services. They were each provided with a debriefing form to take with them. Confidentiality was ensured by attributing a pseudonym to the participants and altering any potentially identifying information.

Analytic approach

IPA is used to critically interpret and analyse participants' accounts (Shinebourne, 2011). This method explores the meanings that people attribute to their experiences. Thus, all experiences have a different interpretation, based on one's sociocultural and historical stance. The IPA applied in this research is based on a critical realist ontological approach which is concerned with the subjective and multiple social reality as it understands that experience is created. However, it is real to the person undergoing that experience and not always accessible in an unmediated manner. Therefore, it takes an interpretivist epistemological stance which aims to understand and interpret the meanings in human experience and behaviour (Smith et al., 2009). IPA is based on three concepts: phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography. Phenomenology means understanding subjective experience through detailed examination of participants' lived experience. The phenomenological focus of this study is on the couple relationship experiences of young women that are both joyful and distressing. Considering this, people make sense of their world in various ways via interpretation. Therefore, this subjective interpretation represents the hermeneutic side of IPA. Furthermore, when the participants give their accounts, they are already presenting an interpretation. Addi-

tionally, when the researcher interprets these accounts, it constitutes a double interpretation and therefore a double hermeneutic approach. Finally, idiography focuses on the detailed experiences of individuals, meaning that the uniqueness of the participants' experiences is at heart in IPA and it also means that this approach requires a small sample size (Smith et al., 2009).

The analysis was conducted based on Smith et al.'s (2009) six-step analysis: each interview was transcribed verbatim including non-verbal nuances, such as emotions and pauses displayed by the participant. The transcripts were then read many times to allow for familiarity with the data and then coded using linguistic, descriptive and conceptual coding. Following this, emergent themes were identified and then arranged into clustered themes and then by superordinate themes for each participant. After analysing each transcript individually, patterns across all participants were noted and transformed into general superordinate themes which reflected a higher and more abstract level of data analysis. It is important to note that each transcript was analysed separately on a case by case basis in order to allow for identification of new themes for each participant and in keeping in line with IPA's idiographic stance, before all participants' final themes were analysed together. The final themes were selected because they were representative of the sample.

Reflexivity

Furthermore, I engaged in reflexivity by considering my position and experiences of couple relationships as a young woman myself. I logged my thoughts and feelings into my reflexive journal throughout the research process, in order to make sense of the data and of my experiences, to limit my subjective impact on the research.

Interpretation

The IPA conducted culminated in three superordinate themes. For the purposes of this article, only one theme will be discussed

(see table 1). The analysis was carried to investigate how young women in couple relationships experience mental health and wellbeing.

Table 1: Superordinate theme and subthemes.

Reciprocated investment contributes to mental health and wellbeing	
Positive impact on the couple relationship if investment is reciprocated	Positive impact on individual's mental health if investment is reciprocated

Reciprocated investment contributes to mental health and wellbeing

Participants who felt that their partner was working towards the relationship appeared to display high mental health behaviours, and also felt that they had a balanced and healthy couple relationship.

Positive impact on the couple relationship if investment is reciprocated

Effort, as a reciprocating action within the couple relationship, was experienced differently in cohabiting and non-cohabiting couples due to the distinct dynamics within these relationships. Within the cohabiting couples, the division of chores along with balancing responsibilities were valued. This balance is illustrated by Monica when talking about attending university:

‘And then when I stopped working to come here, it was working out a new balance, so he pays for most things, which equates to me being able to come here and then having more free time at home, cause as I said I’m only up here three days at the most and I work, but it’s only part time, it’s about 12 hours a week so hmm. I do more of the house work, to kind of counteract to what he’s doing financially.’

Monica considered that her partner contributed to her empowerment, by taking on the financial responsibilities so she could attend university on a full-time basis. This seemed to lead her to reciprocate her

partner’s behaviours by taking on more chores around the house. This was done to achieve a balance of responsibilities and she perceived this to have a positive effect within the couple relationship. The balance of responsibilities is renewed as the relationship goes along in order to allow for changes in circumstances.

In addition, Ursula, who also lives with her partner, mentions that relationships require mutual investment, cooperation and adaptation to each other’s identity in order to be successful:

‘The most important thing is that we actually work together towards our relationship. Because I think that relationship is really hard work. It’s like you know, you meet, you’re sharp and bold and you do whatever you want in your life. But then you live, you start to live with other person and other person also has some preferences and hmm you just learn how to live with it, you know. If you’re a rock those parts become not as sharp after a while like you know, time like water make it not as sharp.’

This adaptation alludes to the notion that couple relationships require mutual investment from both individuals in order to achieve a harmonious cohabiting situation.

With regards to the experiences of participants within a non-cohabiting couple, the reciprocating behaviours valued were: having good emotional support as well as good communication. This is illustrated in

Phoebe's case, in which she describes how her own emotional problems, while a teen, contributed to a poor relationship with her partner because of lack of communication: *'Like I was always blaming him because I felt like he could never live up to my expectations but the problem was that my expectations were really high.'* Phoebe's expectations were unmet, which appeared to cause her further mental distress. However, when she lowered them accordingly, she displayed better mental wellbeing. Therefore, emotional understanding is valued. Thus, there are differences between the experiences of participants who are cohabiting versus non-cohabiting with their partners.

Positive impact on individual's mental health if investment is reciprocated

Participants' mental health also seemed to improve by the mutual investment within the couple relationship. In the next quote Rachel describes a romantic action from her partner towards her:

'When I came back into the room it was like candles lit and like roses on the floor and everything and I just didn't feel like, cause he's not very romantic like that, so for him to do something like that is very uau you know. So that's what made me feel happy and joyful.'

Rachel perceives that her partner surprised her in a romantic way in order to meet her expectations and make her happy. She claims that he adopts these attitudes in spite of not appreciating himself romantic attitudes. If the investment that is made within the relationship is matched, this seems to translate to positive consequences for the participants' mental health and wellbeing.

Furthermore, in Ursula's case, her mental health seemed to improve in her experiences of the couple relationship only when there was reciprocation and investment from her partner's side via communication. The quote below describes how

Ursula's mental health was negatively impacted by poor communication with her partner:

'He could not understand me of course because I was angry and I was not talking to him, I was not communicating, because I didn't know myself why this is happening to me. And I couldn't explain it to him and especially when I was feeling very stressed, I couldn't speak at all, so I stopped speaking, I stopped talking, like I cannot talk. And he used to push me like: Why are you not talking, tell me what is happening. So that was getting me and making me worse.'

Ursula was formally diagnosed with depression and panic attacks, which she said caused her to have difficulties in communicating her needs to her partner. In turn, Ursula felt that her partner was not able to understand and address her needs, which seemed to lead to behaviours that worsened her mental health such as pushing her to talk to him. However, once Ursula was able to communicate her needs to her partner, they cooperated to improve her mental wellbeing:

'So yeah because he worked together with me on that I think that helped, a lot, to be honest. I'm not sure if I would handle that without him.'

This means that reciprocating patterns within couple relationship, via cooperation, can contribute positively to participants' mental health and wellbeing. Thus, Ursula has the perception that her mental health was improved by the cooperation and communication with her partner. She feels that they have learned together how to deal with her mental disorder and thus ways to overcome the barriers it poses for her in the relationship.

Overall, mutual investment within the couple relationship seemed to be valued and to contribute to improved mental health and wellbeing.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that couple relationships appeared to only have a positive impact on the participants' wellbeing if their investments within the relationship were reciprocated. This is in line with Braithwaite and Holt-Lunstad's (2017) selection model, which emphasises that couple relationships help improve mental health and wellbeing. The current study has added to this by demonstrating that mental health can be positively impacted by the couple relationship via cooperation, emotional support and mutual investment within the couple. This seems to be because when the young women who feel that their partner is reciprocating their efforts within the couple relationship, they appear to perceive that their expectations within the relationship are met and thus feel fulfilled.

Furthermore, young women who were in cohabiting versus non-cohabiting couples seemed to experience different expectations and reciprocation attitudes within the couple relationship. Whilst young women in cohabiting couples shared their experiences about sharing a living space, young women in non-cohabiting couples expressed difficulties in arranging suitable times in which to spend time with their partner. This might be because young women who are cohabiting with their partner are at a further stage of the relationship than young women who are not in a cohabiting couple (Willoughby et al., 2012). Therefore, the stage that the couple relationship is in can contribute to different reciprocating needs from the partner and these should be renewed in order to contribute to a higher level of mental health.

Future research should compare the experiences of young women in cohabiting versus non-cohabiting couples. This is because this study has found that young women experienced their couple relationship differently in terms of relationship dynamics and reciprocation needs. This is a weakness within the inclusion criteria defined, which future

research could address. Previous research identified that there are few differences between cohabiting versus non-cohabiting couples in relation to relationship quality (Willoughby et al., 2012). However, their research did not focus on investigating young women's perspective. In addition, Willoughby et al.'s (2012) study concluded that this only applied to cohabiting couples that were not using their cohabitation as a stepping-stone towards marriage.

Even though this research explored young women's experiences in couple relationships, future studies could explore in more depth how young males experience couple relationships and wellbeing. This is because there is little research on young males' experiences within a couple relationship. Previous research found that males are socialised to be individualistic and to separate their identity from the quality of their couple relationships (e.g. Soller, 2014; Whitton et al., 2013). This could mean that young males experience their couple relationship differently compared to young women in regards to mental health and wellbeing. In addition, it would also be beneficial to look at the experiences of both partners within the couple in regards to relationship dynamics and mental health. In this way a clearer picture can be obtained about the meaning of the couple relationship and impact on wellbeing for both individuals.

In spite of this study's limitations, this investigation holds value, as it will hopefully fuel research into the field by considering the differences between groups in couple relationship experience and mental health impact. This study has contributed to the existing literature by exploring the complexities in which mental health and wellbeing can thrive and decline in the context of couple relationships.

These findings have the potential to aid support services' understanding regarding this phenomenon by shedding light on the role that couple relationships play in young women's mental health, and the different

impact couple relationships can have depending on their differing qualities. Thus, more comprehensive counselling support can be provided. In addition, educational settings could provide relationship education to young university students to promote better relationships and better mental health. This study has addressed a gap in the literature concerning the link between mental health and couple relationships in a holistic and in-depth manner, which may in turn fuel further research in this area.

To conclude, the quality of couple

relationship seem to influence young women's mental health and wellbeing. The processes that lead young women to be affected by couple relationships rely on reciprocated investments within the couple relationship. If these conditions are met, young women tend to display a higher level of mental health.

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Event Review

QMIP at the European Congress of Psychology, 3rd–6th July, 2023

Imaging new futures while reengaging with the past

William Day

THE 18th European Congress of Psychology (ECP) began with rows of pristinely coordinated shiny pink waistcoats cutting through a darkened auditorium. This was the Brighton Gay Men's Chorus taking their place, stage right, to welcome us to the ECP opening ceremony. Effortlessly harmonising through a selection of camp classics, as the Chorus reached the Pet Shop Boy's *It's a Sin*, I was hit by the poignant connection to psychology's harmful tendencies. Thinking of Pauline Collier's (2023) harrowing account of aversion therapy, the affective qualities of the song's opening lyrics took up a pointed meaning:

*When I look back upon my life
It's always with a sense of shame
I've always been the one to blame
For everything I long to do
(Lowe & Tennant, 1987)*

In that moment, the song as sung, infused with both a sense of melancholy and defiance, seemed to (re)foreground the role that psychology had played in pathologising sexual diversity and the horrors of dehumanisation. Acknowledging and holding these feelings as we – a room filled with colleagues from all manner of psychological contexts sat, looking forward to an invigorating congress – felt necessary.

To briefly collapse the chronology of this review, the *rehumanising* antidote of qualitative enquiry served as a hope-filled centre to Hannah Frith's invited address. Delivered as the penultimate talk in the Qualitative Methods in Psychology's (QMIP) symposium, the address was a wonderfully freewheeling take on a keynote. Hannah told a celebratory story of how qualitative storytelling has contributed to *social* sustainability through a focusing on experiences of mental ill-health and distress. After an opening meta-narrative about the writing of the talk currently being presented, Hannah first looked to historical accounts of marginalised persons' (Fanon, Szasz, Chesler) experiences of 're-storying' mental distress. That, by doing so, the social determinants of health are brought to life through storytelling. What was 'illness', instead recast as revealing the problems of living under conditions of inequality. Looking to more recent examples of creative qualitative research (Boden et al., 2019; Jannesari et al., 2022; Seymour-Smith et al., 2021), Hannah illustrated how playful approaches to research can create opportunities for different narrators. However, we – as qualitative researchers – need to appreciate the ways in which collecting data will change us; being attentive to the labours of listening that sometimes become minimised by our shared technical turns of phrase. What does, for example, 'building rapport' *really* mean? Are we not, in that moment, attempting to build

authentic connections? Doesn't that sound so much more demanding? As I was still holding the contrast between psychology's past (evoked through the ECP's opening ceremony) and our more recent present, this felt like a worthy trade: that we as researchers would gladly take on these burdens, rather than rushing back to being proponents of prejudices.

By way of re-establishing some temporal order, Hannah's invited address took place on the first day of ECP, Tuesday 4th July 2023 in Brighton, UK. As a result of the diligent efforts made by incoming QMiP co-chair, Laura Kilby, QMiP was successful in its application to host a nested event at the Congress. I was there as one of three early career academics, tasked with the responsibility of showcasing potential futures for qualitative research. To a filled room, our symposium was opened by Professor Abigail Locke who gave an account of the continued development of the Qualitative Methods in Psychology section; the battles won and those challenges we still face. Despite the many achievements made by qualitative researchers, it was clear that – against the positivist dominance of the discipline – in some contexts, we still find ourselves on the margins. However, the growth of links between international research communities (such as SQIP and EQuIP) was heartening to hear; particularly given the European context of the ECP.

It was then my turn. Presenting a study from my PhD, I aimed to show how taking a pluralistic approach to analysis illuminates holistic understandings of health conditions and the stigma around claiming health-based welfare benefits. Data came from interviews with eight UK based individuals, all living with 'unseen' chronic health conditions, who had experiences of claiming welfare. Encouraged by the sense of opportunity, potentiality and bridge-building present in modern qualitative psychological research – captured in both Abigail and Hannah's talks – I made use of analytical methodologies pluralistically. Data was first explored through a phenomenological lens, before a 'honing in' on narrative elements identified as discursive-important. Having the

chance to present this work to such a receptive and inquisitive audience was a really worthwhile experience; as I come to the end of my PhD, it was reassuring to know I could have (some sort of) an answer to the insightful questions received.

Next up was Mohammed Malik who deftly considered how qualitative research adds to understandings of sustainability in fashion. Full of charm and humour, Malik's talk drew connections between psychological research and UN Sustainable Development goals. It became clear how further qualitative research is needed to help tackle the range of social issues that can be exacerbated by the fashion industry, such as social inequality and mental ill-health. Malik outlined an upcoming module he has designed around the psychology of sustainable fashion: I found myself thinking how lucky the undergraduate students at Nottingham Trent University are.

Anastasia Rousaki's talk explored a fantastical rich analysis of how parents and carers of adolescents' construct 'sexting' and position adolescents in relation to gender. Delving into an intimidatingly large dataset (15 dyadic interviews with 30 parents and carers of adolescents), Anastasia deployed a critical discursive approach to deconstruct the ways in which heteronormative norms have been preserved or reconstructed within the modern phenomenon of sexting. Most notably in the discussion around non-heteronormative contexts, Anastasia expertly showed how through her use of critical theory, new discursive affordances 'opened up' the potential for new, liberatory futures.

Due to some fortuitous scheduling by the ECP scientific committee, after a short break, we reconvened to hear Laura Kilby speak about her work around UK media representations of Muslim women who become labelled in the media as 'Jihadi brides'. Laura's analysis concentrated on the British woman Shamima Begum and engaged with Galtung's typology of violence (1990) to show how intersecting discourses of gender and Islamophobia converge within media reporting. Being clas-

sified as a 'Jihadi bride' entailed a number of discursive positions such as being seen as a traitor to their 'gendered kin'; or a non-citizen other, someone lacking in political agency. By exploring these 'villainous' narratives, it became worryingly clear that, through their reporting around Shamima Begum, the UK media actively stokes all three of Galtung's conceptualisations of violence: direct, structural and cultural (1990).

Following Hannah Frith's invited address, we came to the finale of the QMiP nested event: a panel discussion hosted by Laura, Hannah and Abigail and joined by Professor Elizabeth Peel, to reflect on where qualitative research in psychology found itself presently. The panel drew upon their own careers and expertise to demonstrate the value psychological research can bring to interdisciplinary work; Liz highlighting how our methodological specificity and precision in research is often appreciated by large, cross-discipline, research teams. Technological advances, such as the current 'boogeyman' of academia ChatGPT, were approached with a refreshing cautious optimism. Advances in how qualitative work had been appraised by the REF were noted, as was the potential for greater future recognition of

qualitative research, given REF 2028's tentative appreciation of public engagement. A mood of community was felt in the room and through the audience's questions and comments, new potentials for collaborations and research opportunities materialised. Cumulatively, the panel's discussion points 'brought home' the robust health qualitative psychological research is in. As an early career researcher, I found myself reflecting on the opportunities I have been afforded; the encouragements to be playful and creative in my research. These incremental advances have only been made possible through the actions, battles and efforts made by those qualitative researchers that have gone before – and by those that are still leading the way. It was a privilege to be able to share my work alongside such supportive colleagues and, with Anastasia and Malik, to play a small role in representing possible new futures for qualitative research in psychology.

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Event Review

The Qualitative Report (TQR) 14th Annual Conference 16–18 February, 2023 *Convenience of Community*

Micah Saviet

IN their useful and practical conference session titled ‘I’m interested in autoethnography, but how do I do it’, Bruce Lilyea and Robin Cooper captured a poignant sentiment that resonated with me throughout The Qualitative Report’s (TQR) 14th Annual Conference: ‘live qualitatively’.

As a first-timer to TQR’s conference, this year titled ‘Living in a Post-Covid World’, I was excited to hear that the 2023 conference had the highest participant registration within its 14-year lifespan. I valued the enthusiasm presenters and attendees brought to the conference. I appreciated the range of presentations, from methodology to theory, programme evaluation, innovative uses of qualitative methods, and much more. Each session I attended seemed to be more engaging than the last, and led me to a satisfying ‘information overload’ by the end of the three days.

I wear two hats, one managing a small research institute and conducting qualitative and mixed methods research, and one as a social worker in clinical practice. My passion for qualitative research methods was sparked during participation in an inspiring two-day workshop with Johnny Saldaña in graduate school, and I have been following *The Qualitative Report* since a colleague and I published an experience piece in the journal (Saviet & Ahmann, 2022).

The TQR conference was one of the most well-organised online conferences that I have attended. The informative emails, clearly

organised and labeled separate Zoom rooms with assigned moderators all contributed to its efficiency and ease. I have found conference management software used in other online conferences often yields more problems than solutions. Adam Rosenthal, TQR Community Director and Managing Editor, received many well-deserved shout-outs throughout the three days of the conference.

In many of the sessions that I attended, in addition to the engaging material presented, there were dynamic exchanges of comments and lively discussions happening in real-time in the Zoom chat. Maybe this is the norm for TQR’s conferences, but this level of interaction was exciting to be a part of and contributed to the sense of camaraderie I had with my fellow attendees.

Naturally, coming out of three years of pandemic life, the recurring theme of technology-infused research, threading throughout the entire conference, and related ethical considerations, such as those raised by Jessica Nina Lester in the opening keynote discussion, were poignant as many researchers discussed how their research or dissertations were impacted and altered by Covid-19 lockdowns. Lester encouraged panelists and attendees to take heed that the proliferation, attraction, and allure of technology may often overshadow the inherent considerations, barriers, and consequences – such as potential vulnerability of virtual data, lack of consistent policies and standards regarding storage and usage across platforms

and programmes, and data privacy regulations differing by country, among others.

As a social worker, I am intrigued by the similarities between the role of reflexivity in qualitative research, and implicit and explicit awareness of personal bias in micro and macro social work. This conference highlighted key themes surrounding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in the qualitative world. Beginning in the opening keynote on day one, and continuing throughout the conference, conversation was held regarding digital divide accessibility, availability, digital literacy, inequitable access, and important considerations of culture, LGBTQ+, socio-economic status, and ethical barriers inherent in technology-infused research. On this topic, Ana Reyes offered a valuable presentation introducing photovoice as well as co-led a workshop with Mónica Rodríguez Delgado titled 'Through our lens: Embracing socially-just & anti-oppressive research'.

The eclectic mix of presenters and styles kept me engaged. For example, in James A. Bernauer's humorous, genuine, unscripted approach while presenting on 'Six voices of discovery: Prologue, monologue, dialogue, polylogue, metalogue, epilogue'; I ended up learning more about the interesting connections and ideas that he has than the actual content of his paper. Dr. Bernauer shared that he has gotten many research ideas from the TQR conferences since first attending 12 years ago. Other presenters adopted a more formal style, using PowerPoints and following the typical structure of an academic paper. Starting with his comments in the opening keynote discussion and continuing to his valuable workshop titled 'A primer on social science theory', Johnny Saldaña's thoughtful and poetic demeanor illuminated complex ideas regarding six properties involved in constructing a research-based theory with daring brevity and precision. In reflecting on his workshop and others that I have attended previously, I find

Saldaña's didactic approach highly effective because of (at least) two primary approaches: vertical scaffolding and horizontal breadth. First, he constructs a solid scaffolding foundation for learners (providing definitions of related terms and concepts) and incrementally layers on material upwards with subsequent ideas logically stemming from prior ones, using ample figures, diagrams, and checking knowledge with applicable examples. Second, Saldaña fleshes out topics to broaden learning by skillfully making connections between introduced concepts and a wide variety of other frames of reference such as analogies, metaphors (e.g. the solar system), quotes from literary works (e.g. the popular children's book 'If you Give a Mouse a Cookie'), popular art, media (e.g. a scene from 'The Silence of the Lambs'), and even proverbs.

Some presenters clearly had decades in the qualitative field. In term of veterans of experience, I particularly enjoyed Carol Isaac's paper presentation on 'Understanding rigour in qualitative medical research' in which she adroitly engaged attendees in examining factors surrounding the importance of upholding qualitative reporting standards. Isaac described her experience as a peer-reviewer for some of the slowly increasing number of qualitative manuscripts submitted to medical journals – none of which she recommended for publication, often due to their inadequately detailed methodological approach despite robust reporting of results.

Regarding technology and the future, throughout his paper presentation titled 'Immersive inquiries: Qualitative research and the metaverse', Csaba Osvath's deep passion and wonder for gaming, AI (Artificial Intelligence), and VR (Virtual Reality) was palpable as he appeared with an animated Hogwarts Express train car background. Harnessing the potential of cyberspace, Osvath provided attendees with a website specifically made for his conference session expanding on his topic with relevant and interesting examples, videos, links, and resources.

Alexandra ‘Xan’ Nowakowski, during her presentation on focus group research with lay pastoral caregivers for dementia shared that feelings of warmth and acceptance keep her continuing to engage with the TQR.

I felt a sense of community in this conference. In my experience, this coherence is rare for a large conference, let alone an online conference. Perhaps this can be attributed to the ‘tribe’ effect – a group of people bonding and assimilating around a collective interest. Despite my relative newness to the field, I felt comfortable as I joined sessions and navigated throughout, appreciative of the inclusion and kindness, and the willingness to share knowledge and offer perspectives.

In summary, the engagement, passion, and rigour of TQR’s conference contributed not only to excitement I feel about next year’s conference, but led me, further, to be intrigued by the possibility of conducting an ethnography about this dynamic and diverse community of qualitative researchers.

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Event Review

The Qualitative Report (TQR) 14th Annual Conference 16–18 February, 2023

Louise Underdahl

As a nascent researcher, I have enjoyed participating in The Qualitative Report (TQR) annual conferences for the past few years. TQR's 14th Annual Conference [1] again surpassed expectations by creating a collegial, creative, collaborative, and constructive forum for considering the conference theme, 'Qualitative data analysis in a post-Covid world'. The TQR community leads by example!

Simultaneous presentation of multiple sessions ensures availability of diverse topics and TQR invites presenters to share PDF materials for participants who were not able to attend their session. Nevertheless, attending 'live' sessions enhances the experience by facilitating synchronous question-and-answer dialogue. These reflections are based on sessions I was able to attend in person.

Collegial

As suggested in Goldspink and Kersey's presentation entitled 'Togetherness in separation: Practical considerations for doing remote qualitative interviews', the online environment requires heightened sensitivity and awareness to ensure the respectful, informal, and collegial forum conducive to meaningful research. According to Goldspink and Kersey:

'This presentation considers the practical and ethical aspects of doing qualitative interviews using synchronous online visual technolo-

gies within a shifting research context. We argue that the immediate access to potential participants and subsequent data collection necessitates adjustments to the ways in which qualitative researchers understand and apply ethics, accountability, and responsibility in their data collection processes.'

In the same spirit, TQR's conference organisers facilitated announcements, panels, and keynotes by sharing comments on the weather, global geographical representation of attendees, and perspectives on 'all things qualitative'. Informal chats with conference participants in an unstructured environment effectively promoted collegial, unscripted dialogue. Each day, the conference's opening plenary discussions synthesised pre-, peri-, and post-Covid experiences from qualitative researchers, data analysis software companies, and the TQR editors, and offered insights on qualitative research's present and future. These informal sessions exemplified expression of the 'subjective opinions, attitudes, beliefs, or experiences' (Percy et al., 2015, p.76), that differentiate qualitative research.

Creative

As an English Literature major, I value stories and narratives as lens for broadening personal experience. Anthony Hopkins portrayed C.S. Lewis in the 1993 film, *Shadowlands*, and said it well: 'We read to know we are not alone.' Until Osvath's presentation

[1] <https://www.nova.edu/academic-affairs/tqr-annual-conference/2023%20Conference%20Presentations.html>

entitled, 'Immersive inquiries: Qualitative research and the metaverse', I had felt reasonably confident that reading was a judicious and suitable approach to vicarious experience. This worldview changed after Osvath introduced virtual reality and how he used it to complete his dissertation, his perspectives on 'phygital' existence, and why the 'metaverse' represents a new frontier for qualitative inquiry. According to Osvath:

'Through this presentation, I introduce virtual reality (VR) and the 'metaverse' as new contexts and frontiers for qualitative researchers. Social VR, spatial networking, immersive gaming/storytelling, and virtual experiences are presenting new challenges and opportunities for researchers. However, inhabiting fully immersive virtual worlds and experiences/simulations will broaden not only the possibilities of qualitative research, but I believe it will create new research methods and paradigms for qualitative inquiry.'

Food for thought...

Collaborative

Contemporary investors increasingly expect both corporate social responsibility and superior financial performance; in the same spirit, socially conscious research yields collaborative solutions. Halsall's presentation entitled 'Implementing the Icelandic Prevention Model in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic: Exploring factors related to time and physical space use that influence youth substance use behaviours' synthesises effective interventions to manage the opioid crisis with a community-based intervention model. According to Halsall:

This paper presents the results of a case study examining the implementation of the Icelandic Prevention Model (IPM) in a rural Canadian community. The IPM is an evidence-based collaborative approach that is designed to influence risk and protective factors to prevent substance use in youth. We utilised participant observation and semi-structured

qualitative interviews to examine key stakeholders' experiences implementing the IPM within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Since lack of access to extracurricular activities and over-abundance of unstructured unsupervised time fuel youth substance abuse, engaging parents, public schools, community stakeholder, and policy makers in evidence-based interventions transforms goals into results. A win/win scenario!

Constructive

Not so long ago, I remember enjoying the 1981 film version of Chaim Potok's *The Chosen*, with Rod Steiger and Maximilian Schell ('a mind without a heart is nothing'), and believing I had acquired a reasonably accurate understanding of and respect for Hasidism. Bucker's presentation entitled 'Today's modern biblical Israelites: Seeking a better understanding of Chabad Lubavitch Hasidism' broadened my perspectives and substantiated philosophy as an agent for positive change. According to Bucker:

'Chabad Hasidism is considered one of the most dynamic forces and fastest growing branches of Judaism worldwide. Following its inception 300 years ago, the Chabad-Lubavitch movement swept through Russia and spread in surrounding countries. The Chabad emergence, documented in the 2021 Pew Report, is a remarkable shift for American Jewish life: 38% of all US Jews have engaged in some way with Chabad programs. US Jewry is changing. It is hoped that the results of this research will provide greater insight into this phenomenon.'

In his session, Bucker clarified nuances of Chabad Hasidism, as a philosophy that emphasises the importance and unique mission of each person as an agent for good, and exemplified the magnetic power an engaging speaker exerts over an audience: not a single pin dropped during this session!

Personal learning

As we know, motivation for learning encompasses intrinsic (learning for its own sake) and extrinsic (learning to enhance competencies); TQR synthesises intrinsic and extrinsic appeal to a global community of critical thinkers united by interest in qualitative and mixed method research. Opportunities to dialogue with interdisciplinary thought leaders (Johnny Saldaña, Co-Editors-in-Chief Ronald Chenail, Sally St. George, Dan Wulff, and Managing Editor / Community Director Adam Rosenthal), and to learn from researchers' studies are complemented

by updates on books, journals, workshops, podcasts ('[You Got a Minute?](#)' [2] series), and software supporting pedagogy and practice. The TQR experience humanises and democratises scholarly research: imagine – attendees were invited to the TQR Editorial Board meeting!

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[2] <https://open.spotify.com/show/6DpKnysa7x1AAHhO1a1Q74>

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Book Review

A journey through qualitative research:

From design to reporting

Stéphanie Gaudet & Dominique Robert

Sage, 2018

Reviewed by **Romany Murray**

Overview

GAUDET and Robert are both professors at the University of Ottawa, each with a breadth of experience in the field of qualitative research, and each with a range of teaching experience in the area. The authors, whilst acknowledging that there are other books covering qualitative methods in considerable detail, describe the purpose of this book as being more of a ‘companion’ to those embarking on a qualitative research project rather than a ‘recipe book’. They emphasise the complexity and creativity that comes with this type of research. This book follows the overall structure of how a research project unfolds, commencing from the time a research question is developed, through the process of research design and data analysis, right up until the point where results are presented.

Chapter 1: Choosing qualitative inquiry

The authors begin by introducing the notion of philosophical foundations in terms of how they relate to research design, bringing in the concepts of ontology and epistemology. They go on to describe how knowledge is created, giving the example that in natural science, we might repeatedly observe a phenomenon, and thus, become able to predict the factors that may lead to it recurring. In social sciences, the production of knowledge is different. Instead, social phenomena are, as described by the authors, ‘created through relationships over time, shaped by the legacies of the generations, institutions and organisations that characterise particular societies’ (Gaudet & Robert, 2018, p.2). In other words, what we observe in the social world cannot be predicted as constantly

and continuously as with natural sciences, but instead, relies on an understanding of context to shape our understanding. In this way, knowledge about social phenomenon is inextricably intertwined with the historical, social, cultural contexts within which it was created, and is described by the authors as being ‘localised’ (p.3).

Importantly, the authors emphasise that their approach to qualitative research is formed on the basis of iterative process, one which they note as being about providing an interpretation of research findings. This is in contrast to a linear research model, which they suggest may be more about providing an explanation for research findings. They discuss how, with an iterative process to research, there is a continual interaction between the theoretical and the empirical, and more room for exploration. In my experience as a doctoral student learning about qualitative research for the first time, I found this a difficult concept to fully take on. As the authors reflect, from the time we are taught about science in schools, we are mainly taught about more quantitative approaches, and so to learn about a whole different approach to research requires a shift in the way we understand research – this has certainly been my experience, and even several years into doing research in a more qualitative way, I have found that at times I can slip back into quantitative habits. In a similar vein, the concepts of epistemology and ontology were new to me when I started learning about qualitative research, and felt very hard to define at first (even now there can be an element of fluidity with philosophical assumptions). Given that the introduction to qualitative frameworks is so essential, my sense was that this could have been the focus of a whole separate chapter, explored in more depth, and the distinctions between the different ways of doing research more thoroughly explained. Likewise, I think that this book would have benefitted

from the addition of a chapter dedicated to the importance of theoretical assumptions underpinning projects, outlining these clearly.

Chapter 2: Designing an iterative research project

At the start of the chapter, the authors define research design as the frame by which a research question is explored, and emphasise that for the research to be of good quality, the design must be coherent with the research question, which is the main take away point of the chapter. They refer to Maxwell's (2013) model of iterative research design to illustrate the interaction between different elements of research, including the research question, conceptual framework, methods proposed, validity and theoretical orientation, and how to some extent there needs to be flexibility for the project to shift over time as it unfolds.

A particularly important part of the research design stage is the research question – arguably, this is one of the first steps that takes place, and the rest of the design hinges around the topic of interest. The authors discuss the process with which a researcher may come to choose a research question. There could be many ways to go about this, and largely researchers tend to be interested in a topic due to having personal links with it. Speaking from my experiences of doing qualitative research, this is a very helpful point that the authors have addressed. Practically speaking, it is likely that a project may take several years to fully design, conduct, develop analysis for, and then write up; therefore, being passionate about the topic at hand may help to ensure motivation going forwards. When coming up with a research question for my doctoral thesis, I tended to be drawn to topics that I felt related to my experiences in some way, and tried to find something that I felt genuinely curious about as a starting point.

As Gaudet and Robert point out, there are other factors to be considered too when

choosing a research question, such as whether the question has already been answered in other research, or how pre-existing literature about a phenomenon may be added to. In knowing the existing research area well, this may help researchers starting their projects to develop a sense of a rationale for the theoretical and empirical relevance of the research question. Again, thinking about my own experience of these processes, immersing myself in the literature around my topic of interest felt very helpful. It helped me learn more broadly about others' experiences of the phenomenon I had in mind, and I felt that it provided me with a good 'base' to develop a research question that I felt had not yet been asked in the literature that already existed. Additionally, it may be that, like I did, researchers need to be able to submit a research proposal, and so this will often involve writing up a literature review to illustrate what value their research would provide, and how it would contribute to the overall area. This chapter balances providing readers with information about the different ways in which research could be approached, whilst at the same time, encouraging them to think about how these things might apply to their own projects.

Chapter 3: Choosing an approach to guide methodological decisions

In this chapter, the authors discuss research methodology as being the vehicle through which a 'reality' may be perceived, and expand upon five methodological approaches, including grounded theory, narrative analysis, discourse analysis, phenomenology and ethnography. These approaches are discussed in relation to their theoretical underpinnings, the history of their development, and the various schools of thought for each.

What is particularly useful within this chapter is that following on from the more 'theoretical' explorations of each methodology, Gaudet and Robert seek to provide readers with examples of how this approach

may be used, and for each provide a segment where they break down the various steps they may use for analysis, relating these to example transcripts on their companion website. For students who are new to methodological approaches especially, I imagine that having the opportunity to read a transcript on the companion website, and follow the authors through the process of analysis from each methodological perspective is likely reassuring, and gives them an idea of what to expect when they do their own research. In this way, there is a brief overview of the practical alongside the theoretical, that feels as though it 'illustrates' descriptions of each methodology. I felt that this was a really helpful way to broach the topic of methodological approaches, as it helped to somewhat 'de-mystify' how one 'does' qualitative research whilst communicating the message that there is no one way that research can be done.

Chapter 4: Choosing tools for your fieldwork

Chapter 4 approaches the notion of data collection through discussing the 'tools' that may be used for the 'fieldwork' of a qualitative research project. The authors discuss within this chapter how these tools can be chosen, clearly encouraging researchers to have an awareness of two main factors when deciding which to use – ensuring that they are choosing tools that have an overall sense of coherence with the philosophical assumptions of the epistemology and theoretical underpinnings of the research project; and secondly, the knowledge that flexibility may be required when choosing which tools for data collection may be used.

Interestingly, Gaudet and Robert reflect on the use of the term 'data collection' when in reference to qualitative research, and state that these terms may suggest a more distanced post-positivist or realist perspective, where the researcher is not interacting with the data – perhaps a more passive approach. Instead, they note that from a more construc-

tivist perspective, the researcher would be very much an active part of data collection, in many ways actually 'co-constructing' the data. Again, as I noted earlier, my doctoral study was the first time I was introduced to qualitative frameworks, and therefore I still occasionally refer to certain concepts within my research using these quantitative terms. Though this is only a shift in the language used to refer to research tools, making small changes in the way that I refer to my data has been something that has been helpful in adjusting my overall approach to research, and helps me to be aware that I play a large part in whatever data I have. In using terminology that is indicative of the theoretical assumptions underpinning my work, I feel as though my attitude towards my research has shifted, and it has allowed me to centre my analysis around this theoretical core with this notion of co-creation.

As with their prior chapter on methodology within qualitative research, the authors discuss three ways in which data may be produced within a project, including via observation, interview and via documents, providing readers with an example of how to use each, step by step. Reflecting on my own experiences as a student conducting qualitative research, I can see that this chapter would have been useful to have to hand in advance of choosing my research tools. The way that this chapter was written seems to promote researcher reflexivity, for example, in their section discussing the use of interviews, the authors provide a prompt of different factors to consider following on from the interview and make a note of. They encourage readers to reflect on not only the interview content, but also the felt sense of the relationship between researcher and participant during the interview, and the contextual information that may have influence (for instance, the room where the interview took place, or what time of day it happened). As a Counselling Psychology trainee, I feel that on some level having an awareness of dynamics between myself and

others is an instinctual part of the way I work with people, be it in a clinical context or otherwise, and this extended to my experiences of doing interviews with participants for my own qualitative research. From this perspective, being reflective about my work comes naturally to me, and I kept a journal to reflect on each interview after it had taken place for this reason, as the authors suggested. Likewise, my interviews were conducted via several different methods (for example, via telephone, email or video call), with this contextual information leaving me with a slightly different impression of the participant, and likely impacting how I understood their narratives. Whilst this was something I was able to reflect on throughout the process of my research, my reflections were something I did largely in hindsight, after I had finished an interview. With the authors providing a prompting list of questions to consider, had I read this chapter before doing my interviews, I may have been able to be more thoughtful of how I entered an interview situation, and more conscious of things happening in the moment that I may have missed.

Particularly for researchers being introduced to the notion of qualitative research who may not be familiar with reflexivity during the research process, or those with different backgrounds who may not naturally need a lot of reflective space, it feels as though the prompts throughout this chapter are likely to be valuable.

Chapter 5: Ethical challenges in qualitative research

As the book has been structured to follow the stages of designing a research project, the authors acknowledge that this chapter begins to move the reader from the initial stages of research conception to the stages where the research may start to actualise.

Before that can happen, it is important to consider the ethical issues that may be involved with the project and what impact they may have upon the participants, as

well as any requirements of the institution supporting the research to take place. The authors note that applications to institutional ethics committees involve drawing together what has already been discussed in the book, with researchers most likely needing to submit a research proposal to a Research Ethics Board (REB) evidencing cohesion between research question, design, and research tools, as well as providing the board with any documentation that the participants may see. This may include consent forms, or information sheets about the project, for example. As most qualitative research will involve living participants, consequently the authors centre this chapter around the three key laws around human protection in these circumstances, including integrity, the interest of human beings, and justice.

During the next sections of this chapter, the authors provide an overview of aspects relevant when considering ethical issues, giving readers an overview of what may be necessary to take into account when requesting consent, making initial contact with participants, maintaining participant anonymity and storing data. One of the more important points covered within this chapter was the ethical issues that can arise in the relationship between researcher and participants. In the teaching I received when learning about qualitative approaches to research, this was something that was touched upon, but not covered in much detail. As a trainee Counselling Psychologist with an interest in relationships between people, I appreciated reading Gaudet and Robert's exploration of the topic in more depth, and enjoyed learning about it. They highlight ways in which researchers could be courteous to their participants, reminding them to show gratitude to the people who have taken part in their research, and to follow up with participants if they requested to hear about the findings. The authors go further than this in their exploration, and draw attention to the power dynamics

intrinsic to the researcher-participant relationship, as well as discussing the various ethical issues that may arise should there be an element of seduction, or of therapeutic 'loss' within the dyad. This is something I would have liked to think more about in my own training prior to conducting my own interviews, so it was good to see this topic covered within the book.

Chapters 6, 7 and 8

The authors start Chapter 6 (Preparing for Analysis and Validity Requirements) by describing it as a kind of 'preparatory' chapter, giving the readers an overview of the overall analytic process before using the next two chapters to go into more detail about what various stages of analysis may entail.

They use the image of a 'palimpsest' to emphasise the notion that 'a new creation can arise from original materials that had been repeatedly deconstructed and reconstructed' (Gaudet & Robert, 2018, p. 139), akin to the process of analysis. The authors refer to the way that analysis is a process of repetition, going back and forth over the stages of analysis and continuously reviewing the codes, themes, and stories that are developed. The analysis becomes a multi-layered process, building up from the 'raw data' developed during data co-construction. Even then, Gaudet and Robert highlight that the analysis is likely influenced also by the literature review, and the theoretical assumptions underpinning the way that we understand the 'knowledge' of the data.

In chapter 7 (Vertical Analysis), there is more discussion around what is meant by vertical analysis. Whilst an overview was provided in the previous chapter, here the readers learn more about the two parts of vertical analysis – contextual condensation and semantic condensation. They break the concept of contextual condensation down further into accessible, easy-to-read chunks, describing first the process of 'identifying the material' before they

describe how readers may document the context of the material production. The context of the material production may include information on the way in which data is constructed, be it via interviews, images, or other qualitative means, as well as information about participants, such as their gender and age. Likewise, Gaudet and Robert illustrate to the reader how the task of 'semantic condensation' may be done, involving the researcher working to develop patterns of meaning across material, and create a narrative by referring to an example dataset on their companion website.

Chapter 8 (Horizontal Analysis) builds upon the different approaches to analysis started in the previous chapter, using the authors' imagery of an analysis being built from multiple layers to add a 'horizontal' analysis to the vertical one presented. The authors bring in another dataset to analyse in order to fully illustrate to the readers how this layer of analysis looks with multiple data sources. They summarise it as 'the comparison of the vertical analysis of each of the sources between themselves in order to generate an iterative interpretation of the whole material' (Gaudet & Robert, 2018, p.178), drawing the analysis together. Whereas vertical analysis may involve specificities, with attention paid to semantics and context, the horizontal stage of analysis requires the researcher to be able to step back and look at their data as a whole to create an overall understanding. Importantly, it is noted that during this stage, the research question from the initial conception of the project may be brought to the forefront. As has been stated at several points during the book, researchers should be aware that due to the nature of iterative process, this question may change and shift through the process of analysis. As before, researchers are encouraged to seek and achieve coherence throughout the research process.

Chapter 9: Theorising and presenting the results

The final chapter of the book centres on theorising and presenting the results of qualitative research. At this stage, the researcher draws on their analysis to develop an overall interpretation. This requires being able to balance both the need to maintain the complexity and nuance of the source material, and the need for the interpretation to be comprehensible so that it may be disseminated in a journal article or research report.

Typology is a concept that is explored in relation to theorising and presenting research, referring to how abstract connections or relationships between material are inductively classified to help create an overall picture of the phenomena studied (Schnapper, 2005). There are several different forms of typology, of which four are discussed in this chapter, including descriptive typology, conceptual typology, mapping, and ideal type.

Gaudet and Robert describe descriptive typology as ‘a stage in the third level of analysis rather than a research result’ (p.199). From my understanding, this is a little similar to the development of a theme when using thematic analysis, where source material is clustered into patterns of meanings. Quality of analysis is accentuated at this stage, requiring that the researcher be rigorous and transparent about their process when categorising their data into different groups of meaning, but notably that they also be mindful of how they manage data that does not fit into categories.

Gaudet and Robert discuss other forms of typology, and how they relate to the overall analysis. For example, my understanding of conceptual typology is that it provides a framework by which we can judge whether data fits into an inclusion or exclusion criteria for each category developed within the descriptive typology stage, as though defining the boundary. From this stage, ‘mapping’ can be used to assist the researcher in determining where ‘unclas-

sifiable’ data falls within the overall data set, and amongst the categories of meaning developed. The authors note that mapping can be particularly useful in helping them to consider how the meanings they have previously developed may answer their research question, and whether they help to explain their findings. Lastly, the ‘ideal type’ typology is discussed, referring to the Weberian tradition of using idealised examples from the data set to explain a phenomenon – they give the example of the category of ‘good neighbour’, and state that to present this category, they would list characteristics typical of individuals who fit into the ‘good neighbour’ type. The overall effect of this is that it helps to strengthen an overall sense of the different narratives present within the data.

Finally, an overview of quality criteria for research is provided, formed on the basis of the work of Antaki et al. (2003), who developed a list of ways in which data is commonly under-analysed. Gaudet and Robert provide some examples of how this might look and how one might recognise when they have under-analysed data, alongside giving some suggestions for how to challenge this. Reflexivity is also discussed at the end of the chapter in relation to the transparency of the analysis, the ability to identify limitations to one’s research, and in terms of discussing counter-examples in research.

Final thoughts

My overall sense of this book is that it stays fairly true to the initial objective set out by the authors at the very start. Whilst readers are taken on a tour throughout the process of developing a research project and are given some very helpful examples of how certain parts of this may look in practice, it still very much feels like a guide, rather than a ‘how-to’. Throughout, the authors provide a lot of prompts and questions for researchers to ask themselves at each stage, which feels particularly effective as it strikes the balance of being informative,

yet in no way instructs researchers of what they 'should' be doing. There is a sense of encouragement and creativity throughout. As a result, though covering some more introductory points, this book would likely be best suited to students who are familiar with the concepts of qualitative research going in, as it provides a thorough expansion of how certain theoretical aspects may relate to practical research.

In line with this, the main 'take away' message from this text was that there needs to be an emphasis on flexibility and cohesion throughout research design and application throughout. This was something that was discussed at several points throughout, and

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is something that I am in strong agreement with, as a qualitative researcher myself. For those starting out building a project from scratch, ensuring theoretical cohesiveness leads to a project that has a clearer focus. I would argue that reflexivity is an important component of both flexibility in research and theoretical cohesiveness, and would have liked to have seen a little more exploration of this throughout.

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Book Review

Researching family narratives

Ann Phoenix, Julia Brannen

& Corinne Squire

Sage, 2020

Reviewed by Nicky Pilkington

Overview (Chapter 1)

THIS book draws upon a series of research projects carried out under a funded programme (Narratives of Varied Everyday Lives and Linked Approaches, or NOVELLA) designed to develop and showcase methods and approaches that capture the complexity of the everyday in narratives of family lives across datasets. The aim of this collection of work is to drive the use and development of a narrative approach to research, both on re-interpreting current datasets and in generating new ones, combining a variety of qualitative (and some mixed) methods across five interlinked projects.

The first chapter provides a research overview and an introduction to the rest of the book. The authors make a case for narrative research as a holistic approach or field, and distinguish this from more specific methodologies such as narrative inquiry. They draw upon the phenomenon of human narratives as naturally occurring and therefore ubiquitous, accessible and inter-disciplinary, as well as a good way of linking theory to practice. This creates an impression of suitability to researching the everyday, which is the explicit aim of the project. They explain the gap in the current literature as the need to strengthen narrative construction in the otherwise well-researched fields of family form and intersectional identities within different family structures. The criticisms of narrative research are accounted for and countered by the importance of narrative upon understanding individual construction of meaning, as well as the ways these add value to other more empirical understandings of individual and family

behavioural interactions and life trajectories. The projects described also endeavour to enhance our understanding of narrative research through the new methodologies developed. The chapter ends with a summary of the rest of the book, emphasising the mixture of methods, use of old and new data, and creation of a framework between the NOVELLA projects to give a holistic view of the complexities of family life.

Multi-method approaches and decolonising research (Chapter 2)

Research presented in chapter two exemplifies the approach outlined in chapter one, using a mixture of qualitative methods, re-interpreting data and collecting new datasets to create a varied and holistic understanding of environment and environmental concerns, both in the home, the neighbourhood, as well as globally for families. The researchers explain how they use the minority world/majority world framework as a less stigmatising way of differentiating countries in a way that aims to continue efforts to decolonise knowledge and challenge 'false universalism' where the 'Western' minority world perspectives are themselves homogenised and seen as superior. This is further developed using the 'common world' perspective that not only incorporates the push back against false universalism and comparatives between majority/minority worlds but also decentres humans in regards to examining the wider ecological landscape as a relational understanding of the environment. This is then fed back into narrative research methods as a way of understanding and bringing together perspectives from research in India and the UK. The illustration of example extracts to show how juxtaposition, as opposed to comparison, can help break down cultural and geographical constructions to understand global issues such as climate change have a powerful impact. They use the data to effectively chal-

lenge colonial minority world normality (in this instance the UK) in favour of seeing how narrative themes are more complex and contextual than either Indian or British. The exploration of a mixture of qualitative methods ('multi-method') goes some way to showing how the research can go beyond interviews to incorporate photographs, walking and family mapping which can also be re-integrated into later interviews to thicken the descriptions and understanding, and getting outside the linguistic problem of the difference between doing and talking about doing. The summary re-iterates the ability of the research to discover meaning more holistically through the 'common world' approach and the multi-methods that enrich understanding.

Secondary narrative analyses (Chapters 3–6)

The following four chapters cover secondary analyses of various datasets, including conventional qualitative data (interviews on fathering and migration, online blogs around mothering), cohort and archival data and 'paradata' written in the margins of a study of UK poverty.

Chapter 3 opens with a discussion around the practice of secondary analysis in general and rightly discusses the view that something may be lost (especially with qualitative methods) by not 'being there' and having more distance from the primary source, balancing this with the advantage of being able to re-contextualise data when analysing it again in the future. The chapter's focus seems mainly to be on process, covering the discussion and reflexivity of the research team interwoven with some illustrations of the data sets. It makes an interesting case for how secondary analysis can re-use rich material such as interviews, in order to answer different research questions and also echoes the majority/minority world comparisons from chapter 2 by giving an example that intersects racial and migrant identity experiences in the context of coming to the UK.

One question this chapter leaves unanswered for myself is, considering the NOVELLA emphasis on families constructing their narratives through experience and ritual, how far can this be understood when focusing just on one family member's experience? This also leads on to question how inter-subjectivity is operating between family data and the research team as, with the distance between subject and researcher, it is possible that more weight and power is left in the researcher's hands in shaping the data than is presumed.

The epistemological stance of narrative analysis of archival data in chapter 4 is clearly stated and the challenge of what to include noted, giving voice to the concern raised above regarding where construction sits in the distance of secondary analysis. The outcome addresses the balance between historical context and maintaining a researcher stance 'in the moment' and is further addressed at the end of the chapter when considering how archives in particular are curated, what is missing and how researcher distance and disruption need to be accounted for. The chapter gives brief examples of how different types of archival data can be analysed to find focused narratives around food, used as a device to centre multiple experiences around. The way that historical periods and various archival materials intersect is interesting, however the notion of family seems noticeable by its absence when analyses are presented.

Chapter 5 focuses on 'paradata', defined as a by-product of data collection and makes an interesting point in what can often be missed during various types of research. Phenomena from item response rates to the details of how an interview is conducted, are all potential data sources for qualitative analysis as they may contribute to the construction of meaning. The Townsend Poverty in the UK survey from 1979 includes an ample source of margin notes, and is also a prime subject choice for secondary analysis in respect to family narratives. Addition-

ally, the nature of the paradata as margin notes by the original researchers and the distance between this data and the secondary researchers creates a particular opportunity for the study of research-thinking. This adds a second layer to the construction of meaning, discovering the positionality of particular researchers as a way of enhancing the miniature narratives of the paradata. This combines to provide some stark and evocative family narratives that are constructed by the original researcher but based on first-hand observations encompassing the families as they were experienced, which is then further contextualised by the secondary analysis. As well as fulfilling the NOVELLA criteria, it provides an interesting commentary on the narratives of academic interviewers/field researchers in exploring how they record their own interpretations, and thereby construct meaning as a by-product of their profession.

Similarly to chapter 3, in chapter 6, secondary analysis of data from a parent (this time mothers) is re-analysed; in this case food blogs. The content here seems to stretch beyond the point of view of the mother and include more obvious family narratives due to the nature of the data, as opposed to the interviews in chapter 4. The example given is a blog describing the participant's family in terms of frugal living and this presents an interesting and rich study from which to understand everyday family narratives. The distance between researcher and data is less pronounced here as much of the material can speak for itself in terms of showing a narrative, though some consideration is given to how reformulation of these narratives has been achieved. This felt like a piece of work that got much closer to the goals of the NOVELLA project in terms of exploring complex everyday family narratives within a context that was relatable, and highlighted the way people think about their own narrated experiences.

Reflexivity and Ethics (Chapters 7 and 8)

Chapter 7 focuses on the experience of two PhD researchers involved in NOVELLA projects, using a reflexive-layered dialogue involving transcribed conversations, notes on these conversations and notes-upon-notes exchanged between the two colleagues. It is this chapter that made me question how the content of the book encompasses and broadens the concept of narrative research as, this came across as another different approach to those above. It certainly embodies reflexivity and it chimed particularly with my own experience as a doctoral trainee in Counselling Psychology, as one of the chapter's PhD researcher's experience of running reflective clinical groups and training in psychotherapy is something that enhances his reflexive narrative. The way that the researchers construct narrative by unearthing and developing what it was they shared in their conversations about themselves seems to share something with the secondary analyses found elsewhere in the book, as new meanings are found in a way that would otherwise be lost in the initial conversations; this really seems to embody the book's take on narrative research, finding something more nuanced in the data that was missed or not quite clear in the first analysis. The wider statements on mental health and the demands of doctoral research also strike a personal chord with myself, and what makes this a poignant and important chapter.

Chapter 8 focuses on the ethical considerations of secondary analysis, something integral to much of the work in this book. Focusing on the example of the study mentioned in chapter 2 which involved working with primary data originally gathered in India, it uses the literal distance seen between the primary source and the secondary analyses carried out by researchers based in London as its main site of ethical consideration. The distance here is analogous to the potential missing of context and difficulties in interpretation, anonymisation,

co-construction and consent; these issues are considered and addressed well and provide useful lessons for researchers looking to make use of secondary analysis. Clearly this is something happening more and more, as data is more often stored and shared in the digital age and some of the dangers around the use of data are touched upon, with one particular example given of a tobacco firm trying to obtain data originally carried out with cancer charity funding. It would have been interesting for researchers to have considered the way data is often a new form of currency in social media, for example as people often give away a lot of their information in supposedly 'free to use' apps and services, though this may be outside of the scope of the book. I felt that ethical lessons around respect for original context and participants fitted well with the notions of reflexivity focused upon in the previous chapter, and overall the notion of awareness seems to be the takeaway message.

Final thoughts

The book has an interesting meta-quality in that much of the writing itself seems to have narratives running through it; the journeys of the researchers, the reflexive conversations developing over time and the ability to look back and think again, create a living human sense of the otherwise disparate collections of questions and data. It is not always straightforward to find the focus on 'family' and often this seems stretched to the fact that family members are the subjects; at other times family is at the forefront and this is where it feels like the material truly hits the mark of what is proposed. Another strength is the clear use of reflexivity, and as someone engaging in qualitative work myself, I definitely feel that this has given me pause for thought to how I will ensure reflexivity in my own work.

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Qualitative Methods in Psychology Bulletin: Author Guidelines

The *QMiP Bulletin* is published on behalf of the BPS Qualitative Methods in Psychology Section and welcomes submissions on any aspect of qualitative psychology. The editorial team are keen to encourage concise, focused articles which may be somewhat shorter than would be found in other journals in the field. In all cases, the Editorial Board will make an initial decision regarding the suitability of articles for publication in the *QMiP Bulletin*. *We strongly encourage prospective authors to contact us with a brief overview of their submission prior to writing and submitting their paper.* This allows us to plan ahead for our issues and consider reviewers in advance which will also speed up your review process. Please note that in all cases, the Editorial Board reserves the right to relax word limits where appropriate.

Submissions are invited under the following broad categories:

View from the Top (VfT)

This first section of each Bulletin issue includes an interview with academics or professionals who have made a significant contribution to their field, with a core focus on qualitative methods. Ultimately, the aim of this section is to celebrate ground-breaking qualitative psychology research from established names and consider their views on topical discussions, both within the field and beyond.

Recent interviews include Paula Reavey and Prof. Elizabeth Stokoe. We also welcome suggestions on future VfT participants. Let us know who you would like to see included in upcoming issues. Whilst our VfT pieces are usually conducted internally, we are open to inviting external authors to be involved in the interviewing process.

Word count: ~3,000 words.

Theory, Method and Pedagogy: Brief reports

We welcome a wide range of articles, including those which provide a commentary, discussion, or reflection on qualitative methods and literature. This may be epistemological, pedagogical, or beyond. We are keen to engage with and promote ongoing debates and developments in the qualitative field, including multidisciplinary work. The Editorial Board would also like to encourage submissions dealing with pedagogical aspects of qualitative methods in psychology.

Word count: 2,000 – 4,000 words. However, longer methodological articles are encouraged with a maximum word count of 7,000 words, excluding References and Abstract.

Empirical Articles

We are committed to publishing high-quality qualitative research in psychology, which contribute to the ways we think about, practice and develop qualitative research. Research articles dealing with empirical matters are particularly welcomed, and we embrace innovation and the variety of qualitative approaches. Word count: maximum 7,000 words, excluding References and Abstract.

Peer Review Policy: All articles and reports undergo rigorous peer review, based on initial editor screening and anonymous double-blind review.

Student Spot

A core element of the *QMiP Bulletin* is supporting early career researchers. The student spot section is an opportunity to showcase research from those near the beginning of their journey with qualitative research. We particularly welcome pieces from undergraduate students, which can be with the support of their supervisor. Whilst these may be empirical pieces based on their dissertation, we are also open to reflective and discussion pieces.

Each piece will be reviewed internally by the Student Spot editor who will provide constructive and thoughtful feedback. We place a particular focus on encouraging early career researchers and are willing to work with authors to improve their article where necessary.

Word count: 2,000 – 4,000 words.

Event Reviews

One of the primary functions of the *QMIP Bulletin* is to provide a platform for publicising and reviewing qualitative research events.

Reviews can be written in a personal style, including reflections on the aims and/or focus of the event, how the event was organised and what the key themes were. We also encourage authors to include reflection on their personal learning in relation to their research interests.

There are a variety of qualitative research events, including conferences and seminars, that could be reviewed for this section of QMiP. Authors are invited to contact India Amos on I.a.amos@salford.ac.uk to talk through a potential event review ahead of submission.

Word count: ~2,000 words.

Book reviews

Additionally, we welcome reviews of key texts within qualitative methods. These may focus on qualitative methods specifically or on a particular topic or area of research within psychology, which utilises qualitative methods.

Reviewers are compensated with a complimentary copy of the title they will be reviewing (usually an e-copy provided by the publisher). Rather than provide a specific list of titles, we encourage those interested to contact the team for a discussion on which titles may be appropriate which are of interest to both our readership and the individual reviewer. Authors are invited to contact Eva Fragkiadaki on Eva.Fragkiadaki@uwe.ac.uk to discuss a potential book review.

Word count: ~2,000 words.

Manuscript preparation

Manuscripts should be prepared according to the British Psychological Society's Style Guide.

Authors are requested to pay particular attention to this when preparing references lists, ensuring they are in line with 7th edition APA style. Please include DOIs. All submissions should be in English.

Manuscripts should be double-spaced throughout and should incorporate page numbers. The title page should include the full title of the manuscript, author name(s), institutional affiliations and contact details.

Authors submitting their work for peer-review should submit two versions of their manuscript: one with identifying information provided, and a second anonymised version.

All articles except for Events and Book Reviews should be preceded by an abstract of 150 – 200 words for longer articles, and 100 – 150 words for brief reports.

Manuscript submission

All contributions should be submitted by email to qmipbulletin@outlook.com

All submissions should be in Microsoft Word format.

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