
One on one with Victoria Clarke: 'Put down your data and go out for a walk' [extended online version]

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One....

Place

I'm lucky to live somewhere very beautiful – a small town on the Southern edge of the Cotswolds. I love going for an evening walk and hearing cows mooing in the fields. On my first family holiday in the Cotswolds as a teenager I fell in love with the landscape, and the Cotswold stone cottages, and remember thinking 'I want to live here'.

Book

No contest! *Changing the subject* by Julian Henriques and colleagues. Read from cover to cover at least three times, and highlighted in all the colours of the rainbow, as an undergraduate. It fundamentally changed my view of what psychology could and should be and the kind of psychologist I wanted to be.

Documentary

I love documentaries and use them a lot in teaching about sexuality and gender. I use Jennie Livingston's fabulous documentary *Paris is Burning* (1990) about the drag ball culture of the Black and Latino gay and trans community in New York in the 1980s to teach students about the social construction of gender and sexuality, and gender performativity, and the importance of thinking intersectionally.

Tool

Mindfulness. More often an aspiration than an achievement. But an amazing tool for managing stress, focusing on what's important, and skilful living.

Achievement

Organising the *Qualitative Research International Summer School* with my fabulous colleagues Nikki Hayfield and Virginia Braun. The Summer School took place in the last week of July 2014, and was sponsored by the Qualitative Methods in Psychology Section. It involved a huge amount of work, but standing in a room of close to 200 people who travelled from all over the UK, and all around the world, to be there was hugely satisfying. In a rare quiet moment I thought 'we did this', we brought all these people together to spend a week exploring the joys and challenges of qualitative research!

Challenge for qualitative psychology in the future

It's clear from running an event like the Summer School, and other qualitative research training events, on a much smaller scale, that there is a great, and largely, unmet need for qualitative research training. Demand among students for qualitative research supervision far outstrips the number of supervisors with qualitative expertise.

Nugget of advice for new/ aspiring qualitative psychologists

I love Ruben and Ruben's (1995) characterisation of qualitative interviews as "on target while hanging loose" in their book *Qualitative interviewing*. That you have a general sense of where you want to go in mind, but you're flexible about how you get there (or indeed, ending up somewhere slightly different). This is a great principle to apply to qualitative research more generally; and I always refer to this in teaching. It seems to help students grasp the ethos of qualitative research.

Cultural recommendation

The film *Pride*, based on the true story of a group of lesbian and gay activists who raised money to help support miners and their families during the miner's strike in 1984-1985. It is both delightfully funny and poignant.

Nugget of advice for supervising and teaching qualitative psychology

I've noticed that students feel reassured when I share what I found challenging when first starting out as a qualitative researcher, or still find challenging. I find it useful to remember that when students are conducting a qualitative research project for the first time all they have experience of is highly polished, coherent reports of qualitative research; they have little or no conception of the messy 'realities' of qualitative research, and this can be hugely anxiety provoking ("I'm doing it all wrong!"). Trying to 'normalise' the mess and share anxieties can help to build confidence.

Hero from psychology

There are too many to pick just one! I admire those remarkable trailblazing psychologists who had the courage to challenge oppressive practices in psychology and the wider society. Pioneers like Evelyn Hooker who challenged the prevailing view in the 1950s of homosexuality as pathology or Naomi Weisstein who vigorously opposed the male bias of psychology in the 1970s. Although I occasionally experience marginalisation because I conduct research on gender and sexuality, and particularly *critical qualitative* research on gender and sexuality, for the most part my research interests are respected and unquestioned. That is thanks to early pioneers like Hooker and Weisstein, and later pioneers like my PhD supervisor – Celia Kitzinger – whose book *The social construction of lesbianism* is a landmark text in the development of a critical psychology of sexuality.

Qualitative psychology publication you are particularly proud of

Right now I'd say my book *Successful qualitative research* (Sage), co-authored with my friend and colleague Virginia Braun. It was something of an epic undertaking to write an authored text covering all the basics of the entire qualitative research journey. When I mentioned to a colleague how long the book was (around 160,000 words), he said 'that's like writing two PhDs!' That comment put into perspective how much work was involved. It's hugely gratifying when we get feedback from students telling us how much the book has helped them to understand, and do, qualitative research.

Hope for the future

Greater understanding and acceptance of qualitative research. Things have changed a lot even in the relatively short period of time I have been a qualitative psychologist, not least

with the establishment of the Qualitative Methods in Psychology Section, but there is still some way to go. It would be great to see qualitative methods being taught *alongside* quantitative methods from day one on undergraduate psychology programmes.

Source of irritation

The assumption that (good) qualitative research involves 'code books', inter-rater reliability scores and other measures to establish coding 'reliability'. In other words, providing a partial and highly selective map of the terrain of qualitative research but presenting it as *the* definitive map. I'd like to see greater recognition of the diversity and complexity of qualitative research in attempts to map the terrain in the future.

Thing you like about qualitative research

A sense of play, fun even, and creativity, particular when analysing (qualitative) data. Analysing data is like having a puzzle to solve. Not in the sense that the analysis is hiding in the data waiting to be found (an assumption that is another source of irritation!), but in the sense that you need to generate a framework for your analysis that pulls together your key analytic insights in a coherent and compelling way. Ideally, with a bit of creativity injected to into it (I am rather fond of theme and paper titles that reference popular culture or play on popular sayings).

Thing that you would change about psychology

A greater recognition that – as critical psychologist Ian Parker (2005) has put it – “what is 'inside' is dependent on what is 'outside'”.

Final thought

Good qualitative research requires time to think and reflect. So put down your data and go out for a walk!