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Collecting Qualitative Data

This book provides a practical and accessible guide to collecting qualitative data that moves beyond the traditional focus on face-to-face interviews. It emphasises a range of textual, media and virtual methods that provide interesting twists on, and are less resource-intense than, established methods, thereby offering the researcher alternative techniques for collecting data. Divided into three parts, textual, media and virtual, the book provides step-wise guidance on methods that are underutilised within qualitative research and offers new and interesting angles on widely used techniques. Contributors share their experiences of implementing each particular technique and highlight both its potentials and pitfalls. What unites all the methods featured in this book is that they are ideally suited to student projects and resource-limited research. The book will be of interest to readers both new to qualitative research and established researchers seeking to broaden their methodological repertoire.

Virginia Braun is Professor in the School of Psychology at The University of Auckland, New Zealand. A feminist and critical psychologist, her research explores gender, bodies, sex/sexuality and health, and she has published extensively in these areas. She is co-author of the award-winning textbook *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners*, as well as numerous other methodological works. Notably, with Victoria Clarke, she developed an approach to thematic analysis which has become one of the most widely used qualitative methods in the social and health sciences.

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health settings and collective socio-spatial identities and intergroup relations. She has an ongoing interest in the intersection of research and practice, and works with many third-sector and public-sector organisations. She has expertise in a wide range of qualitative methods, and she is excited by creative (and multi-modal) ways to collect, analyse and use qualitative data.

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Collecting Qualitative Data

A Practical Guide to Textual, Media and Virtual Techniques

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The Story Completion Research Group includes Victoria Clarke, Nikki Hayfield, Naomi Moller and Irmgard Tischner and various postgraduate students including Iduna Shah-Beckley and Matthew Wood, both of whom have contributed to the writing of Chapter 3. Other students have given their permission for us to use their research as illustrative examples.

Gareth Terry is Senior Research Officer at the Centre for Person Centred Research at AUT University (Auckland, New Zealand). His research fits broadly in the areas of critical health and critical social psychologies, with particular interests in people's experiences of life with chronic health conditions, men's health, body image, reproductive decision-making, and masculine identities. He also has methodological interests in thematic analysis, critical discursive psychology and qualitative survey development, and has contributed to edited volumes in these areas.

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Foreword

Brendan Gough

Qualitative research is a rich, diverse field which is ever expanding and fragmenting. However, this diversity is all too often confined to specialist journals and conferences – the type of qualitative research featured in established journals is often quite formulaic, dry and dull (see Brinkmann, 2015). Students and early career researchers may be forgiven for thinking that qualitative research constitutes doing interviews and then attempting to generate some themes from the resulting transcripts. As the editors of this book and various other qualitative researchers have noted, however, interviews can be re-imagined in enriching and productive ways, whether facilitating the recruitment and engagement of otherwise hard-to-reach participants via communication technologies (messaging, Skype, etc.), or employing meaningful artefacts (e.g., photographs, treasured possessions) and activities (drawing, story completion) to help enliven and extend face-to-face interviews (e.g., Guillemin, 2004; Jowett, Peel and Shaw, 2011; Sheridan and Chamberlain, 2011).

Beyond interviews, there is a world of qualitative data to be sought, selected and/or collected, ranging from newspaper and magazine articles (and readers' responses to stories) to online sources, such as discussion forums, blogs and social media content. Moreover, the use of media and virtual data sources in qualitative research can be less time-consuming, less challenging and less ethically complex than more traditional face-to-face interviews and focus groups – and therefore appealing to novice qualitative researchers working on time-limited projects. A text like this is therefore to be welcomed, opening up a whole new repertoire of innovative methods which can engage current and future generations of qualitative researchers. As such, it builds on and extends recent calls to document, deploy and celebrate diversity in qualitative enquiry (e.g., Madill and Gough, 2008; Gough and Lyons, 2016).

Rather uniquely, this book foregrounds data collection. It is curious that most qualitative methods textbooks tend to emphasise different modes of analysis over data collection, and that, invariably, those methods of qualitative data collection that do feature are interviews and focus groups. In explicating

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different (and some novel) techniques of gathering, generating and finding qualitative data, current and potential qualitative researchers are provided with clear guidelines, illustrations and reflections which will help them make informed choices for their own research endeavours. All chapter contributors are experts in the methods they present, and offer valuable 'insider' insights into the particular practices, potential pitfalls and pleasures involved in their own brand of qualitative research.

Given that quantitative researchers are becoming more acquainted with qualitative research methods, it is refreshing to see a whole part of the book devoted to qualitative 'experimenting' with conventional quantitative tools, such as surveys and vignettes. Qualitative surveys, for example, present a series of open questions in order to encourage participants to provide more detailed accounts of the topic in question than would be gathered using traditional numerical scales and tick-box questionnaires. The qualitative survey can also empower the researcher/s by delivering high sample sizes and large datasets, which many mainstream journals expect from submitting authors. The other methods covered showcase creative modes of eliciting personal accounts from participants; the use of hypothetical scenarios (story completion; vignettes) may engage participants to explore personal experiences without feeling exposed, while bespoke diary methods allow participants to develop meaningful accounts and reflections over time.

It is also pleasing to see a part on media materials – resources too often left to the margins of qualitative research or to interdisciplinary fields such as media studies, where theoretical preferences can often override methodological rigour. Because we live in a world which is media-saturated, it would be strange if qualitative researchers did not attend to media content. A focus on print and broadcast media can tell us much about contemporary (and competing) norms, and it is great to see coverage of newspapers and magazines (representations) as well as radio material (social interaction) in Part II. The availability of media content online makes such data easily accessible for qualitative researchers, with the opportunities for feedback online for readers, viewers and listeners offering further data seams for qualitative researchers to mine. The production of accounts online, whether through blogs or discussion forums, allows access to often personal stories which might be difficult to generate using face-to-face interviews, and it is good to see chapters which draw on these online sources.

The online environment is the focus of the final part, with the emphasis on ways in which the researcher can interact with participants using available digital technologies. Various modes of communication are promoted: interviewing via email, messaging and Skype, as well as online focus groups. As such, the classic qualitative methods of individual and group interviews

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are reworked, enabling remote dialogue with participants while also presenting some challenges. Again, the advice and examples presented will be welcomed by qualitative researchers interested in using diverse digital means of encountering participants.

In sum, this book breaks new ground by bringing together a collection of authors and methods which illuminate new and exciting ways of doing qualitative research. I expect it will be very popular and will prove to be an invaluable resource for novice and experienced researchers alike. I for one will be using it for teaching and research purposes, and will be encouraging my colleagues to do likewise.

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