

Jörg Frommer & David L. Rennie (Eds.). (2001). **Qualitative Psychotherapy Research Methods and Methodology**. Berlin: Pabst Science Publishers.

Reviewed by *Finn Skårderud*

Psychotherapy has come to occupy a central place in Western culture. Psychotherapy is about changing people. Therefore it is a profoundly subjective experience. The theory and practice of psychotherapy do not involve only the subjectivity of those receiving it. They also entail the subjectivity of those conceptualising its nature and providing it. It is open to endless modifications responsive to whatever interests theorists and clinicians bring to it. The joint subjectivity involved in psychotherapy make it especially challenging as a researchable activity. How is it possible to approach rigorously, meaningfully and thus compellingly an activity that is inherently so unstable?

The journal *Psychologische Beiträge* (Vol. 43, 2001) has made a special edition on qualitative psychotherapy research. This is also published as a book. The editors for this two hundred pages edition are the professors Jörg Frommer from Magdeburg in Germany and David L. Rennie from Toronto in Canada. The book is constituted in the main of revisions and expansions of papers given at the first international conference on qualitative psychotherapy research, held in Düsseldorf in 1996.

From the reader's point of view an anthology is often a difficult text. Different authors are on different missions, with different styles of writing, different concepts, rhetoric etc. And the main impression may be more of fragmentation than of unity. I do think this anthology is more successful. The editors have been conscious about constructing "a dramaturgic arc" in the text. In their own introduction they present some questions that qualitative psychotherapy research has to address today. Then the rest of the book is organized in two parts, dealing with the two very most basic questions:

Firstly, what methodological justification does qualitative research claim within the scientific discourse dominated by positivism?

Secondly, what empirical methods constitute good qualitative psychotherapy research? The editors let different methodological and theoretical flowers bloom, by presenting themselves through actual research projects.

And finally the editors sum up: What is the state of art?

I think it is seldom to find a book, so competent and compact, that can give us such a united picture of the plurality of contemporary qualitative research on psychotherapy.

The novice, the researcher with little experience or the generally interested reader may be very satisfied by some of the basic discussions in the first part. But such readers may experience an academic impotence working through other texts, particularly in the second part. It is easy to go wild in the many different methodological approaches, with local concepts and names. Such readers may experience a wall of theoretical and methodological jargon, standing

outside. For the more experienced readers and researchers, for those on the inside of the jargons, this book presents qualified argumentations and stimulates new ideas for practical work.

In their introduction the editors describe the two main avenues of approach to psychotherapy research. One is the hermeneutic tradition, the other the natural scientific.

Hermeneutics traditionally has entailed the interpretation of textual material that is difficult to understand. Applied to psychotherapy research, the discourse between therapist and patient may be understood as such a text. Hermeneutics takes it for granted that different people engaged in the same text may derive different interpretations. The role of subjectivity is basic and it is acknowledged.

Alternatively, the natural scientific approach to psychotherapy research draws on research practices in the biological and natural sciences. The application of psychotherapy is likened to an experiment, with measures of “variables”. In this tradition attempts are made to nullify the subjectivity of the researcher.

In the history of psychotherapy research the hermeneutic approach has had an uneasy relationship with the natural scientific one. It has not been accepted as “real research”. It is in the context of such a conflict one saw the development of “a third road” of inquiry in psychotherapy research – qualitative research. This approach has been visible on the scene the two to three last decades. Although not accepted on equal terms with the natural scientific approach, the psychotherapy research community is increasingly open for qualitative therapy research. The common ground of different qualitative approaches is the attempt to reconcile the opposing perils of objectivism and relativism.

This book has one central and necessary text. This is marked by the position as the first contribution, after the editors’ introduction, and by several references to this text in the rest of the book. I am referring to Steinar Kvale’s argumentations about the psychoanalytic interview as qualitative research. Some readers may already know this text from its first appearance in the journal *Qualitative Inquiry*.

Is the psychoanalytic interview science or not?

Kvale borrows a metaphorical frame for his argumentation from Greek mythology. In his return to Troy, Odysseus must pass the perilous strait between Charybdis and Scylla. On one side of the narrow strait is the monster of Charybdis, swallowing whole ships with their crew. For the therapeutic researcher this may be a metaphor of being carried away by clinical anecdotes and exciting case histories. This may equate the lack of methodological reflection, not at least reflections about the validity of the knowledge. On the other side waits the six-headed monster of Scylla. In this research context this may mean the fear of not being scientific enough, trying so hard to avoid therapeutic anecdotes that the research ends up with losing the lived relations in a web of statistical correlations, and producing results with limited relevance to the therapeutic relationship. Kvale calls this kind of positivistic straight-jacket “imitative scientism”.

His contribution is a clear and precise presentation of pros and cons. And then he comes to a conclusion. This lucid analysis must be read as a defence for the psychoanalytic interview as an example of good qualitative research. In contemporary academic psychology and psychiatry it is very trendy, almost tiresome, to reject Freud. This argumentation convincingly challenges such a position. More than that: Kvale even goes so far as to define the psychoanalytic method paradigmatically as a milestone of qualitative research.

He draws attention to extensive parallels between qualitative research and the psychoanalytic interview, such as knowledge production through interpersonal relations, generalizations from case studies, and validation through communication and action. He particularly underscores the influence of the interpersonal interaction of the interview situation. Further this concerns the importance of extensive knowledge of the research participants and their life situation over longer periods of time for making sound interpretations and for critically validating interpretations of the participants' statements.

His conclusion is that therapeutic researchers, with today's refined maps of their knowledge area, now may be able to navigate more safely through the dangerous strait between a no-method Charybdis and an all-method Scylla.

Let me quote: "Existing philosophical and methodological refinement of knowledge about the human situation makes it possible for interview researchers to go beyond the opposing alternatives of uncontrolled case reports and overcontrolled experimental-statistical investigations... They may return home with exciting tales from their adventures to the strange and difficult accessible sites discovered through the therapeutic interview, and perhaps inspire other interview researchers to adventurous pursuits in the new domains."

I want to present another of my favourites in this book, also from the first part about methodological justification. That is Jörg Frommer and Michael Langebach's further argumentation for the possibility of making good science out of the Freudian heritage. While Kvale concentrates on the psychoanalytic interview – rather than the therapy process – these authors focus on the short story-like, narrative character of the declining genre of the psychoanalytic *case study*. They attempt to work out a coherent logic of justification for the case study as a source of epistemic knowledge. They follow – and complement – Kvale in arguing that the qualitative research methods and the psychoanalytic case stories converge in interesting ways. What particularly inspires me is the way they introduce Max Weber and his concept of *ideal type*. Intuitively I feel that the ideal type may be a feasibly methodological tool when wanting to create science out of the clinical everyday as a psychotherapist.

Similar to Charcot and Freud, Weber has defined ideal types as model assumptions which are "... formed by the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present, and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified thought-construct".

It is a term that bundles past and present, giving shape and sense to disparate empirically observable attributes. Of course, the crux is the discrepancy between this invented ideal type and what one can observe empirically. The ideal type is a generalization and a hypothesis but, in conjunction with the so-called test of experience, it can form the basis for an interpretation, which makes biographical details intelligible and meaningful.

Ideal types are, first of all, hypothesis-like constructs of empirical research, in which evaluative judgements of logical, comparative relationships between reality and ideal types must be distinguished from value-oriented assessments of reality, due to ideals. Secondly, in distinction from categorical frameworks ideal types reflect a high degree of subjectivity and individuality, and serve to systematically characterize behavioural motives. Finally, the concept of ideal types allows one to view any subject under investigation as indissoluble from social, historical and cultural contexts.

The employment of ideal types has just recently been introduced to psychotherapy research. In the second part of this book, dealing with what empirical methods constitute good qualitative research, Ulrich Stuhr and Sylvia Wachholz go deeper into the ideal types. They present to us a further discussion of the concept, not at least by Uta Gerhard's reworking of the concept into *Verstehende Typenbildung*. This could be translated to "forming types by comprehension". With this concept as the guiding research tool they give us useful examples from a concrete project. The aim of the project was to describe patients' inner picture of the therapist twelve years after therapy.

Let me briefly present other contributions. In part one the book's editor David L. Rennie dives into the popular qualitative tradition Grounded Theory, originally developed by Glaser and Strauss in the sixties. He discusses grounded theory and whether it should be considered hermeneutics. It is, indeed, hermeneutical, he states. This contribution draws on several lines of traditional and contemporary philosophy and integrating them with Dilthey's hermeneutical work. For the more advanced.

In the second, practical part Robert Elliott, Emil Slatick and Michelle Urman give us an extensive and detailed description of how to use alternative research strategies on *change processes* in psychotherapy. These include Grounded Theory Analysis, Task Analysis, Discourse Analysis, Conversation Analysis and Comprehensive Process Analysis. This is a rough guide to methodology.

We get more demonstration of the analytic tools in William B. Stiles and Lynne Angus' presentation of the Assimilation Model. This model seeks to identify particular problematic experiences in life and tracking them across sessions in the therapy dialogue. John McLeod and Sophia Balamoutsou present a method for qualitative narrative analysis of psychotherapy transcripts. Finally, Constance T. Fischer, Jodie Eckenrod, Sonja M. Embree and John F. Jarzynka refer from twenty psychotherapy dissertations completed in the Psychology Department of Duquesne University in a period of twenty years. The theoretical and methodological basis for these presentations is phenomenology. As a presentation I find these less interesting, due to the character of listing.

As a conclusion, after reading this book/the special edition of the journal, I will join the editors in their conclusion. The different contributions show that there is a new engagement in investigating psychotherapy, as a part of a wider hermeneutic engagement in the complexity of human experience: This engagement, with risks and problems "...is a meaningful, exciting and, within its own framework, coherent. If current trends are any indication, these qualities are proving enough to carry it forward".