Qualitative Research and the Editorial Tradition: A Mixed Metaphor

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ABSTRACT

THE EDITORIAL PROCESS FOR JOURNALS in library and information science has tended to follow quantitative positivist research standards. Qualitative research presents problems of definition, structure, voice, and meaning that can influence the reactions of editors and referees, who may reject that which they do not adequately understand. Publication of reports of qualitative research projects may require some accommodation by authors, editors, editorial boards, and ad hoc referees. This article discusses why authors should understand the editorial process—what is expected and what is required—and the ways in which it influences the characteristics of individual journals. Editors, editorial boards, and referees should try to better understand what authors expect of them. Strategies for changing this in the editorial environment can be implemented through attention to the partnership that links authors and editors in their shared goal of benefitting both individual readers and the profession as a whole.

INTRODUCTION

Although qualitative research as such is far from new, there has unquestionably been a recent noticeable growth of interest in qualitative studies. Qualitative approaches have extended into areas of inquiry that were formerly the sole domain of quantitative methods. Areas of study that had only recently approached universal acceptance of the quantitative

domain have found that acceptance modified by the introduction of qualitative methods. Scholars have employed qualitative paradigms to question the research traditions of entire fields of study. Growing recognition of the value, whether real or perceived, of qualitative research has produced disagreement, conflict, a vast volume of rhetoric, and not a small amount of confusion (Mellon, 1990, p. 6). The growth of interest in qualitative research in library and information science has been subject to the additional stress of occurring in a time frame that overlaps substantial concern for the absence of rigorous quantitative research in the field.

The dissonance accompanying increased interest in qualitative methods has not bypassed the editorial process. Editorial procedures, philosophies, and traditions have been challenged by the shift to different ways of thinking about research. Authors reporting the results of qualitative studies feel that the editorial process is too rigidly tied to the paradigm of positivist scientific research. Editors, editorial board members, and referees accustomed to the predictable rigor of quantitative studies encounter equal difficulty in interpreting and assessing qualitative studies.

THE EDITORIAL PROCESS

Accommodating what many consider to be a new paradigm for understanding essential phenomena requires a broadening of the range of acceptable scholarly products. This need for expanded flexibility creates a natural tension with the basic purpose of the editorial process for scholarly works. That purpose, which can be stated succinctly and without ambiguity, is the quality assurance of scholarly publications: "Editors believe that their responsibility is to provide a forum for quality scholarly research in terms of style, content, and timeliness" (Steffens & Robbins, 1991, p. 201).

"Disciplines are frequently judged by their literatures. The formal literature, especially the journal literature, is the primary means of communication across the entirety of a field" (Budd, 1992, p. 42). The importance of the published record is generally accepted but rarely questioned. Publication in any area of endeavor takes place for a variety of reasons and addresses a range of purposes. Beals (1942) characterized publications in library and information science as consisting of "glad tidings, testimony, and research" (p. 165). In his analysis, publications in the former two categories were numerous but of limited utility, while the last was grossly under-represented in the literature of the time. A later characterization called attention to the problems of "sad tidings, lamentation, and antiresearch," and found that all three are present in abundance in the recent literature of library and information science (Van Fleet & Wallace, 1992). Even within the context of seemingly universal acceptance of the roles and contributions of research to professional knowledge and practice, the need for research in library and information science is frequently questioned. When controversy over approaches to research is added into

the equation, the tendency to reject the validity of all research may be a natural outcome.

The publication of research results plays a variety of serious roles, including providing intellectual and methodological context, crediting the contributions of other works, providing a base on which to build further research, and establishing responsibility for the work reported (Macrina, 1995, p. 69). Each of these roles, which reflect further on the basic principle of ensuring quality of style, content, and timeliness, has influenced the editorial environment for scholarly publishing. The charge to the editor is precise and demanding; the responsibilities of the editor are both intensive and extensive.

McCook (1992) has described editorial responsibility as comprising three phases: *identifying audience, selecting manuscripts*, and *preparation for publication*. In the first phase, the editor must determine the audience of the journal and develop a strategy for meeting the needs of that audience. In the scholarly publishing environment, the audience is generally specialized and highly focused but not necessarily self-defining. Assuming that the audience for a journal supported by a membership association consists wholly and exclusively of members of the association can be an error with appalling consequences. In an era during which a change is occurring in the research paradigm of a field of study, it may be unexpectedly difficult to precisely identify a journal's audience.

The second phase of the editorial process focuses on selecting, from the population of manuscripts submitted, those that actually merit publication. Although nearly all scholarly journals accept unsolicited manuscripts within the context of a carefully formulated set of instructions to authors, the role of the editor is frequently more proactive than reactive. An effective editor consciously strives to maintain an awareness of the range and depth of research in the field and actively explores opportunities to reflect all dimensions of the field in the journal. The editor of a scholarly journal must maintain a healthy balance between unsolicited and solicited manuscripts, with both categories undergoing a consistent and equitable review process.

The first and second phases of the editor's responsibility require a comprehensive understanding of the purposes of publications. The pragmatic, sometimes skeptical, principles of the "publish or perish" nature of the academic environment cannot be lightly dismissed. "Regardless of the setting in which scientific research occurs, publications have become a stock in trade. In academic settings, publications help scientists with grants, promotions, tenure, higher salaries, and professional prestige" (Macrina, 1995, p. 70). The pragmatic contributions of publication to the career success of the researcher have played an essential role in the development of editorial processes. The ways in which publication can serve purposes other than the advancement of knowledge have had a

profound impact on the development of editorial philosophies, policies, and practices. Recognition of the potential for cynical motives underlying submission of manuscripts for consideration has served to underline the need for rigorous review of manuscripts prior to publication.

Scholarly journal publishing has in most fields been accompanied by the development of a system of peer review by editorial boards and/or peer referees. "In most disciplines. . .the editor does not have the sole responsibility for determining journal content. The penchant for quality control virtually insists that more individuals be involved in the manuscript review process. For this reason peer referees are recruited from the field to apply their knowledge to the question of which to accept and which to reject" (Budd, 1992, pp. 49-50).

The third aspect of editorial responsibility is preparation of the manuscript for publication. The rigors of the editorial review process have in many cases produced a certain uniform identity for articles published in any given journal. Nearly every journal has its unique look, feel, and character. That character is reflected in superficial attributes such as article length, typography, use of a particular stylesheet, and presentation of nontextual material. The personality of the journal is represented less formally in areas such as a tendency to publish a particular category of research, perceptions of the methodological rigor of the articles published, and status of the journal as reflected by various subjective and/or objective measures. Even within a family of journals, such as those that share a publisher, there are variations in the characteristics of individual journals that lead to a feeling of pronounced uniqueness for each journal.

The somewhat uniform character or personality of an individual journal, in itself a result of the editorial process, also has a profound influence on the editorial process. The journal's editor, editorial board, and referees naturally develop a shared vision of the nature of the journal. At its logical extreme, this shared vision results in an environment in which editorial decisions are nearly binary—i.e., a manuscript either matches or does not match the accepted profile of the journal. When manuscripts are presented that challenge or stretch the shared profile, the tendency is to reject the manuscript as being out of scope, of inferior quality, or both.

The implications for a journal serving a field affected by a changing or emerging paradigm may be grave. The scholarly journals recognized as being of critical importance and high quality will tend to be aligned with the preexisting paradigm. Recognition of the newer paradigm may lead to the creation of new journals but cannot be fully achieved unless the new journals attain the status of the established journals or these established journals accept the validity of the emerging paradigm. The challenges to the editorial process are substantial and may be perceived as threats, as is true with any challenge to a body of tradition.

DEFINITIONS

Definition, both conceptual and terminological, is a fundamental problem of qualitative research. From a conceptual point of view, there is a distinct lack of uniformity in description and discussion of the relationship between qualitative and quantitative research. Mellon (1990) contended that the two "might more appropriately be considered as opposite ends of a research spectrum that combines varying amounts of descriptive and statistical data" (p. 19). Fidel's (1993) view, though, is that: "Qualitative research is *essentially* different from quantitative research; the difference between them is not a matter of degree, and in some aspects, the two are opposites"(p. 220). Given this divergence of views toward the basic nature of the qualitative domain, it is hardly surprising that it is difficult to identify concise and consistent definitions of specific terms.

As Bradley and Sutton (1993) pointed out in their introduction to a *Library Quarterly* symposium issue on qualitative research: "In spite of the superficial clarity of the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research, the lack of consistent usage makes a comprehensive definition difficult, and the diversity in methodological approaches that claim some qualitative connection threaten[s] to call into question the usefulness of the label altogether" (p. 405). Although the term *qualitative* has been chosen as the key term for the present article, it is not universally accepted nor is there any uniform definition for the term. Similarly, this article has attempted to employ the phrase "qualitative research" with some consistency, although the nouns "inquiry," "methods," and "scholarship" appear frequently both in the present work and in the broader literature. The variety of terms used as synonyms, near-synonyms, or quasi-synonyms makes understanding the qualitative research paradigm a potentially intimidating process.

Is all nonquantitative research qualitative research? As a specific instance, does narrative history derived from documentary and archival sources constitute qualitative research? Glazier and Powell (1992) distinguish between qualitative and nonqualitative research, defining nonqualitative in terms that suggest congruence with definitions of quantitative research while avoiding use of the term "quantitative." If this is a valid distinction, how may the two concepts be defined? Is quantitative research inherently nonqualitative? Are there forms of nonqualitative research that are also nonquantitative? Are there forms of qualitative research that are also quantitative? Can quantitative data be presented in a report of a qualitative study? Is naturalistic research necessarily either qualitative or nonquantitative? Does the development and explication of grounded theory require the employment of qualitative methods? Are ethnographic studies inherently qualitative? What is post-positivist research? None of these questions can be easily or definitively answered.

A problem for an individual involved in the editorial process is that qualitative research is unlike pornography in that one does not necessarily know it when one sees it.   Similarly, qualitative research is not like art: the viewer does not necessarily know what he or she likes.   To many advocates of qualitative research, the meaning of the term and its differentiation from other terms are essentially self-evident. To the uninitiated, unschooled, or skeptical, the distinctions may be matters of semantic vagary or seem to be the outcomes of deliberate obfuscation. A grounded theory, a term readily interpreted only by the cognoscenti, has been defined as a theory "that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 23). Since all modern scientific research since the time of Sir Francis Bacon has been based on the principle of induction, the distinction between the logical positivist definition of inductive research and the definition of inductive employed in the context of grounded theory processes can easily seem to be excessively subtle.

A consequence of the terminological quagmire in which qualitative research is currently trapped is that editors, editorial board members, and referees are presented with a wide variety of unfamiliar terms that are used inconsistently by different authors.   It is not difficult to understand the resultant conceptual and terminological dissonance. Although it may seem to be essentially unfair, the author of a manuscript reporting results of a qualitative study at present may have a much greater obligation to define and describe the methodology, its value, and its implications than does the author describing the outcomes of a survey, an experiment, or a narrative history. When faced with a review environment in which it is uncertain whether the individuals and groups responsible for evaluation and decision-making will share the author's understanding of a concept area, the author has no choice other than to provide explicit and complete definitions.

REACTION, RECONSIDERATION, AND REJECTION

The growth of interest in qualitative research has been met with a mixture of caution, skepticism, and occasional scorn. In Davis's (1990) words: "For better or worse, librarians have discovered qualitative research. For better, because naturalistic inquiry has much to offer librarianship. For worse, because librarians probably will use it as yet another excuse for avoiding mathematics in general and statistics in particular" (p. 327).

Many proponents of qualitative research have elected to describe the benefits of qualitative approaches to understanding human and natural phenomena largely or primarily in terms of the limitations and failings of quantitative scientific research. The rhetoric used to describe the contribution of qualitative research has had a notable tendency toward overstatement and has included contentions such as the following: "It has long been felt by many that quantitative measures are inappropriate for

evaluating and understanding libraries" (Wilkerson, 1990, p. 120). In some cases, scientific research as founded in the principles of logical positivism (an expression largely absent from the vocabulary of quantitative researchers) has taken on the appearance of a straw man. Quantitative scientific research has been described as rigid, unitary, unforgiving, artificial, and mechanistic. Qualitative research has been described as flexible, multifaceted, responsive, humanistic, and naturalistic (although rarely natural). To the objective or reflective observer, neither characterization of the terms is entirely accurate or completely valid.

The response of some scholars schooled in the traditions of mostly quantitative scientific research has been fairly predictable. Quantitative research as understood and described by quantitative researchers is very different from the same phenomenon as understood and described by proponents of qualitative research. This terminological and conceptual dissonance has resulted in a tendency on the part of quantitative researchers to reject qualitative methods more or less out of hand. There is an interesting phenomenon at work: qualitative researchers who built their basic methodological tenets on rejection of what they viewed as the essential characteristics of quantitative research have seemingly been astounded to find that quantitative researchers may reject qualitative research on precisely the same grounds.

Although qualitative research has frequently been described in terms of an alternative paradigm to quantitative research, it is very unclear whether the distinction between the two approaches to research is great enough to constitute a true paradigm shift. It certainly does not seem as if the rise of interest in qualitative research resembles the sort of fundamental revolution described by Kuhn (1972). In library and information science in particular, it does not really appear that any research base has assumed a dominant enough role to be considered a paradigm for the field. From the point of view of the impact of research on professional practice, and the translation from research to practice to societal benefit, nearly all library and information science research, whether quantitative or qualitative, must be considered exploratory. The concept of a dominant research paradigm carries limited weight in such circumstances.

Ultimately, researchers in all domains need to accept the potential contributions of all approaches to research: "Any attention to research, especially in the professional literature, should be good news" (Davis, 1990, p. 327). "In gathering data for theory building, all appropriate methodologies must be considered. It is pointless to debate which methodologies may be 'better'" (Grover & Glazier, 1985, p. 250). Rejecting quantitative methods on qualitative grounds is no more logical or beneficial than the reverse.

Open-mindedness is especially essential in the editorial context. It is, however, an inevitable function of research that certain methods, tools, or

paradigms attract attention during certain periods of time. Library and information science research has seen rather clearly defined periods during which experimentation, surveys, bibliometric analysis, factor analysis, or qualitative studies, among other approaches, seemed to be the dominant forms of inquiry, especially among doctoral students. This is not essentially a matter of a research fad but may appear to be so. Ultimately, "the research problem must determine the research approach. . . .No single approach fits every problem; a choice must be made" (Westbrook, 1994, p. 242). The definitive issue is not a matter of which research method has been used but of whether it has been appropriately and rigorously applied to the research problem at hand.

STRUCTURE

Generations of authors, editors, and associated interested individuals have grown to recognize, accept, and approve a rather specific structure for scholarly publications. A brief and cogent introduction precedes a description of the research question, which may be accompanied by explicitly stated scientific hypotheses. Thereafter, the author provides an explanation of the methodology, the application and results of that methodology, a focused discussion of the results, and an analysis of the results that may include the application of quantitative methods. The presentation generally concludes with an explication of the author's views of the implications of those results and in many cases suggestions for further study of the basic problem at hand. This format has been followed for thousands of doctoral dissertations, many of which have formed the model for one or more publications. Quite often, it has been possible to use adherence to the expected structure and order of presentation of a scholarly manuscript as a preliminary criterion for assessing the quality of the manuscript.

Qualitative research is frequently framed in terms of preparation of a narrative that matches the specific nature and requirements of the research project rather than any particular model of, or structure for, presenting results. Authors of qualitative research reports are encouraged to search for the appropriate narrative stance from which to convince the reader (Richardson, 1990, pp. 54-56). To a researcher whose experience is mostly with presenting quantitative results, the notion that "we choose how we write" and that these "choices have poetic, rhetorical, ethical, and political implications" (p. 64) may seem foreign, difficult to accept, and generally antithetical to the rational view of scientific inquiry.

VOICE

Reporting the results of a research project is a very specific and tailored application of language. The challenge for the author is to find the language that best expresses the processes, results, conclusions, and

implications of the research project. The challenge for the editor, editorial board member, or referee is ensuring that the language provided by the author will be understandable to the reader. Far too often, authors are guilty of writing exclusively for readers who have a predisposition to understand the research project. Equally too often, editors, editorial board members, and referees have a tendency to be receptive only to those research projects they can themselves readily understand and assimilate. The potential for a mismatch between the process of authorship and the editorial process is obvious.

Lindlof (1995) has pointed out that "the classical view of science induced what amounts to a 'trained incapacity' among many scientists to use, or even recognize, language as a critical part of their work" and that in the traditional scientific approach to research "writing and formats were viewed as *neutral instruments* for reporting science. Mathematical notation was considered the ideal way to enact this version of science" (p. 247). For many scholars educated in the traditional, essentially quantitative, research paradigm, it was felt to be necessary that the personality of the researcher be, to the greatest extent possible, excluded from the preparation of the research report. This was facilitated through the use of determinedly factual third-person narratives in which adjective and adverb modifiers were used sparingly if at all. These principles have become a standard part of editorial practice and policy and have found their way into the instructions given to prospective authors of journal articles.

A fundamental characteristic of much qualitative research is the understanding that the researcher cannot be and should not be divorced from the research process or from the subject of the research process. Authority in a qualitative research report is established not through the application of established and unimpeachably objective methodologies but through the preparation of an essentially personal narrative presence (Lindlof, 1995, p. 248). Reports on qualitative research are therefore often presented in the first person and frequently are very personal in nature. To the editor, editorial board member, or referee schooled in the quantitative research paradigm, the presentation of a rather intimate first-person narrative often seems jarring, distracting, and amateurish. Overcoming this interpretation is a task of which the author of a manuscript based on a qualitative research project must be aware and to which editors must attend.

MEANING

Because of the very personal nature of observation and reporting, many discussions of qualitative research emphasize the possibility that the results of this type of research may be neither transferrable nor generalizable. The essential task for the author is to explain why such results are of interest. In a fundamentally pragmatic field such as library and information

science, editors, editorial board members, and referees very naturally have considerable difficulty in understanding why the readers to whom they feel substantial responsibility should be interested in, or concerned with, research that does not lead to transferrable, generalizable, or applicable results.

Regardless of the nature or specific techniques employed in a research project, mere reporting of procedures and results is never sufficient. Editors, editorial board members, referees, and readers of research reports expect, and are entitled, to read articles that convey results, analysis, and meaning. Although the mathematical formula may stand as the model for the presentation of results of quantitative research, a manuscript presented in purely mathematical terms would have extremely little potential for being accepted for publication. In fact, many journals that tend toward highly quantitative articles request that referees assess a manuscript's potential for being understood by readers who are not prepared to assimilate the quantitative content. The telegraphic mathematical presentation may in some contexts seem to be the ideal but is in reality almost never an acceptable publishable approach to the presentation of a manuscript. Few, if any, journal editors explicitly evaluate qualitative research on the basis of a manuscript's potential for being understood by readers who are not prepared to understand the qualitative content. Expecting readers to automatically understand qualitative research, though, is clearly no more reasonable than expecting readers to automatically understand quantitative research.

Far too many authors of reports based on qualitative research are seemingly reluctant to provide analysis of results and provide the reader with clues as to the meaning of the results. Extensive discussions of targeted populations, samples derived from those populations, methods for studying the samples, and results of those methods are presented with no meaningful analysis of results and no suggestion of what those results may imply. Presumably the author expects that the reader will want to reach his or her own conclusions. In a practical field such as library and information science, this is a particularly unreasonable and inappropriate expectation. The researcher writing for other researchers may have some right and opportunity to assign the task of interpretation to the reader. The researcher writing for a population of readers consisting primarily of practitioners has an absolute and infallible obligation to present analyses, conclusions, and interpretations as well as methods and results (Mellon, 1990, p. 98). There is, in some ways, an interesting paradox in the presentation of qualitative research results: although many authors firmly believe in the inclusion of the researcher's personality in the research process and the presentation of results, many appear to be convinced that the author's personality should not be extended into the realm of interpretation and conclusion (Mellon, 1990, pp. 100, 103).

To a considerable extent, this reluctance to guide the reader toward conclusions is codified in the literature of qualitative research. A typical piece of advice to writers of qualitative research reports is: "Give serious thought to dropping the idea that your final chapter must lead to a conclusion or that the account must build toward a dramatic climax" (Wolcott, 1990, p. 55). There is the implication that providing a conclusion is unnecessary coddling of the reader, who should be able to use what has been read to formulate his or her own conclusion. An extension from this principle is the notion of the "in-progress paper," a research product that explicitly acknowledges the ongoing nature of the inquiry and deliberately avoids the notion of "writing up final results" (Richardson, 1990, p. 49). Articles based on quantitative studies typically achieve this sense of continuity by following a section on the implications of the results with a section on anticipated potential future research efforts; this approach provides closure for the article itself while maintaining recognition of the need for continuing study.

WHAT THE AUTHOR EXPECTS OF THE EDITORIAL PROCESS VERSUS WHAT THE EDITORIAL PROCESS EXPECTS OF THE AUTHOR

Discussions of qualitative research tend to give a great deal of emphasis to the process of "'writing up' in all phases of the research process" (Bradley, 1993, p. 446). Careful textual recording of results, notes, questions, and impressions is a consistent emphasis of qualitative methods. This process, however helpful to the research in progress, has the potential for being detrimental at the point of submission of a manuscript for publication. As noted previously, "the expectations of the scientific research community for the structure of a research article are well established, and most articles from quantitative traditions in the social sciences follow that format. The formats for presenting the results of qualitative work are not nearly so fixed, although different traditions and qualitative research communities have their expectations and criteria for effective reporting" (Bradley, 1993, pp. 446-47). Disagreement between the author's expectations of the editorial process and the editor, editorial board member, or referee's expectations of the author are at the heart of the mixed metaphor of the interaction between qualitative research and the research tradition.

Authors and editors share a common expectation—i.e., respect. The author expects the editor to acknowledge the effort, integrity, and unique contribution of the research process that led to the manuscript being considered for publication. The editor expects the author to recognize the niche of the journal in which publication is sought and to frame a manuscript that matches the expectations of the topic, the audience, and the editorial policy of the journal. When the accepted or acceptable research

paradigm of a field is in a state of transition, the potential for reciprocal failures in delivering the anticipated respect is heightened.

Researchers working in areas that are topically or methodologically new may justifiably feel that they are at a disadvantage when entering the process of seeking publication of their results. It would be an unusually naïve researcher who did not recognize that each journal has its own personality. Finding the successful match between the character of the research product and the personality of the journal can be an intimidating undertaking. An author may feel that it is necessary to unduly compromise the nature of the research process to match a manuscript to a journal. This perception of unwarranted compromise, frequent enough among researchers employing innovative quantitative methods, may be overwhelming when an author of a qualitative research report seeks publication in a journal with a largely quantitative tradition. The author receiving a negative decision or a request for revision from the editor may feel that such action represents a fundamental failure to understand the qualitative research paradigm and its manifestations.

The editor, on the other hand, expects that authors will form a familiarity with the journal that will lead to a manuscript that matches the journal's policies and traditions to an acceptable degree. Adherence to an accepted research standard may be manifested in an expectation of a manuscript that adheres to an anticipated format within a reasonable level of tolerance. Factors that seem fundamental to the author, such as the use of first person narrative rather than third person, may seem to the editor, editorial board, and referees to be trivial and unexpected divergences from the norm. Individuals involved in the editorial process may conclude that the author was inattentive to the nature and needs of the journal and deliberately or wantonly submitted a manuscript that was a mismatch for those needs.

STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE

Advice to Authors

Every author has a set of obligations to fulfill. Among these are honesty, integrity, and clarity. The obligation of honesty is in most ways an obvious one: any author is expected to properly attribute ideas and facts, to employ analytical tools in a legitimate manner, and to report results accurately. In the area of integrity, the author is expected to observe accepted ethical guidelines such as those for research involving human subjects, select a methodology appropriate to the research question or problem, engage in activities that ensure validity and reliability of results, and strive to interpret results in an accurate and unbiased manner.

Clarity is perhaps the most stringent of the author's obligations in that the honesty and integrity of the research undertaking are conveyed through the act of authorship. The author is responsible for providing a

description of the research problem, the research process, and the results that can be understood by the reader with a minimum of additional effort. The need for clarity is greatly intensified in a practice-based discipline such as library and information science, in which many readers are not themselves researchers. The author is charged not only with explaining what was done and the results thereby obtained but also with explaining why it was done and what is implied by the results.

The author who effectively writes with clarity as the paramount rule has the greatest potential for success both in surviving a journal's editorial process and in influencing the readership of the journal, which is the ultimate goal of publication. Returning to the contention that "audience is all" (McCook, 1992), the author must carefully assess the potential audience for what is being written. Although writing is a personal process, the author does not write for self. Although publication depends on editorial acceptance, the author does not write for the editor, editorial board, or referees. Although publication may be a requisite for tenure or promotion, the author does not write for faculty personnel committees. The author writes for the reader, who is usually a practitioner: "If ... authors write to communicate, they should strive to insure that the fruits of their labor are read. It is in the reading, not in the writing, that the service function of communication is realized" (Budd, 1992, p. 43). The effective author in library and information science should assume a readership of intelligent, but not necessarily research-oriented, professionals.

Every researcher assumes a specific persona for the act of authorship. This persona may be constant across different acts of the same author or may vary from publication to publication. A key element of addressing the task of writing is a working understanding of that persona and how it affects the reporting of research results.

Traditionally, scientific publishing has assumed a rather neutral persona, a supposedly objective observer of the external natural universe. This assumption has resulted in reliance on third person narrative, inclusion of statistical or mathematical notation, construction of quantitative tables or figures, and a very constrained use of descriptive prose. Proponents of qualitative research tend to favor a more personal "narrative presence" (Lindlof, 1995) that recognizes the impossibility of separating the observer from that which is observed. Such a narrative is usually written in the first person, is consciously subjective, makes limited use of quantitative content, and tends toward figures that are logically or descriptively schematic.

Whether the research reported is quantitative or qualitative, whether the report is objective or subjective, regardless of whether first or third person is employed, the author must be conscious of, and carefully preserve, the relationship between personality and persona. Personality and

persona cannot be completely separated nor can they be completely identical. The author who overly personalizes the narrative risks sinking the impact of the results into a morass of impenetrable narrative prose. The author who excessively divorces personality from persona risks presenting a manuscript that is stilted and dehumanized. The author's challenge is to find the appropriate balance. This balance is not tied to any particular style or approach but is a fundamental element of the search for clarity. The best authors find a balance that makes personality and persona coterminous but not synonymous.

The paramount obligation of the author working in a domain that is perceived as being new territory for the journal is to enhance clarity to the greatest extent possible. The reader needs to be told why the research endeavor is important, why and how the methodology is appropriate, how much trust to place in the results, and what the results mean. One of the patterns that has emerged with the rise of qualitative research is a tendency toward over-explication of methodology to the point of apparent defensiveness. Although the author has an absolute responsibility for explaining and justifying the methodology employed, it is possible to go too far. Again, the author must assume intelligence, although not foreknowledge, of the specific context for, or techniques employed in, the research project being reported. For the most part, the author should describe and explain the specific procedures and tools employed, not the entire domain of qualitative research. The survey researcher is not expected to provide a complete treatise on the nature of, and need for, survey research. The bibliometrician is not required to provide a complex definition of bibliometrics. The ethnographic researcher is, likewise, not required to define and justify all of ethnography. Every research author is, however, obliged to provide an appropriate sense of context as a framework for understanding the specific project being reported.

Advice to Editors, Editorial Boards, and Referees

The obligations of editors, editorial boards, and referees are essentially the same as the obligations of authors, one step removed. Because the editorial process is subsequent to the conduct of research and the preparation of a manuscript, the participants in the editorial process are placed in a position of reacting to, rather than driving, the research process. The major obligation of the editor, editorial board, and referees is to evaluate the honesty, integrity, and clarity of the manuscript. Advising on the acceptability of the manuscript for publication is an outgrowth of the primary obligation, as is providing feedback to the author that may result in improvement of the manuscript. "While the author is responsible for the paper itself, the referee shares in the responsibility for its publication; papers do not get published without some sort of active approval" (Budd, 1992, p. 50).

The editor has a very important obligation with regard to the refereeing process. Budd (1992, pp. 55-59) has described the potential for bias in the refereeing process. The editor of a scholarly journal cannot be expected to assume total responsibility for making decisions regarding the acceptance or rejection of manuscripts submitted for publication, nor can the editor assign all responsibility to an editorial board or ad hoc referees. The editor has a very distinct responsibility for guiding and directing the refereeing process to ensure maximum objectivity and minimum bias in the decision-making process. This may entail rejecting the recommendations of referees regarding specific manuscripts or the removal of specific individuals from editorial boards or panels of ad hoc referees.

The participants in the editorial process are primarily dependent on the clarity of the manuscript to provide clues to honesty and integrity. Preexisting knowledge of the research models or techniques employed by the researcher can be a valuable tool, but most editors fully understand that such knowledge may not be readily available. Editors, editorial board members, and referees strive to emulate their perception of the typical member of the audience for the journal and to read from that point of view.

It is easy for an editor or referee to adopt an attitude of excessive adherence to the rules presented to prospective authors. With regard to person, for instance, the instructions for *Library Trends* manuscripts explicitly state that authors should "avoid using 'I' (except when expressing opinion), 'we' (except when giving opinions of joint authors), or 'you.' Especially in text relying on opinion or personal experience, avoid excessive informality; consider using a literary essay style" (*Author Instructions for Preparation of Manuscripts* for *Library Trends*, 1998, p. 2). The editor or referee who takes this stricture too literally may fail to recognize that, in the emerging qualitative research tradition, essentially all narrative accounts are viewed as being statements of opinion and a considerable amount of informality may be considered to be far short of "excessive."

Just as the author must maintain a balance between personality and persona, the editor or referee must maintain a balance between preserving the style of the journal and preserving the intent of the author and the integrity of the research project. Although maintaining the unique personality of the journal is an appropriate and essential goal, journal personalities, like human personalities, must evolve over time. Recognition that accommodating a particularly valuable manuscript may require some deviation from the norm is a reasonable expectation. This does not mean that the author's wishes must, in every case, be granted. Accepting a manuscript written in the first person because understanding of the research project and its results is best facilitated via a personal narrative is

a reasonable accommodation. Accepting a manuscript written in the first person when ideas could just as effectively be conveyed in the third is not.

This leads to another editorial obligation. It must be understood by all parties involved in the editorial process that style itself is not an indicator of a particular approach, model, or method. The inclusion of numbers does not make a research report quantitative, just as writing in the first person does not confer qualitative status. The reader with editorial responsibility must be able to reach beyond the superficial stylistic qualities of the manuscript and make judgments based on the merits of the content.

CONCLUSION

The need for flexibility and acceptance of diverse approaches to research has clearly been met to a considerable extent in the literature of library and information science. Reports of qualitative studies have been published in a broad cross section of mainstream journals. A series of articles published in the *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*, historically one of the most quantitatively oriented journals in the field, employed ethnographic techniques to study sense-making in work planning (Solomon, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c). White and Wang's (1997) *Library Quarterly* article employed a largely qualitative approach to studying the citing behavior of researchers, an area of inquiry dominated by quantitative studies. Chatman's (1992) exploration of the information environment of older women received a best book award from the Association of College and Research Libraries.

The criteria of quality and rigor—of honesty, integrity, and clarity—on which reports of research are ultimately evaluated apply equally to all methods of inquiry. The value of a specific method or family of methods depends on the appropriateness of the method to the problem. A research report is meaningful only if it addresses a problem of interest to the reader, who is the ultimate judge of the importance of the research endeavor. The author of a research report has an obligation to help the reader find meaning.

The editor—and by extension the editorial board and ad hoc referees—serves as an agent both for the author and for the reader. The editorial process is intended to facilitate a partnership in which the author extends to the reader a source of beneficial knowledge. As is true of any partnership, this collaboration can work only when all involved parties are committed to the endeavor and share a joint vision of the desired outcomes of the process. This necessarily complex partnership can and does provide opportunities for all forms of scholarly inquiry but requires that all participants work diligently to encourage and protect the efforts of one another. The mixed metaphor of the editorial process and qualitative research can and will become a matter of common parlance.

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