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Introduction to the Special Issue

Qualitative Analysis Conference 2014:  
The Social Construction of Boundaries: Creating,  
Maintaining, Transcending, and Reconstituting Boundaries

Qualitative research in Canada has and is stretching into innovative methodologies and informing national dialogues around policy, research, and action. This is reflected in the research presented at the Qualitative Analysis Conference, which this special issue is based on. The conference, now in its 31st year, continues to foster and support qualitative research, across boundaries and disciplines. Providing an atmosphere of mentoring and support, both senior and junior researchers participate and interact throughout the sessions. Additionally, each year draws more international scholars to this remarkable conference. The community of qualitative researchers in Canada has no organizing body, no institutional guardianship over this conference. And yet, year to year, members of this community step up to volunteer their hard work and many hours organizing and keeping this unique conference as an ongoing feature of the Canadian Sociological landscape. It is a place to draw together great minds into dialogues which foster creative and new ideas, projects, and innovations.

This conference has also enjoyed generous funding support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (Canada’s federal funding agency for post-secondary humanities and social sciences research and training), as well as numerous partnering universities from across Canada (see: www.qualitatives.ca for more information). I must pause to also acknowledge the dedication and hard work of the other organizers: Steven Kleinknecht, Carrie B. Sanders, and Antony J. Puddephatt.

This year we held a workshop on publishing, with a panel of international journal editors, along with sessions covering a broad range of topics on the conference theme of boundaries such as education, age, consciousness, identity, occupation, (dis)ability, parenting, space and place, health, gender, ethics, and research. In addition, for the first time, we had several sessions, which fostered and encouraged undergraduate participation in the conference experience, nurturing their future potential academic sides. Our featured speakers each approached the idea of boundaries from a different perspective. These included Michael Atkinson on boundary cultures in professional sport, Staci Newmahr on professional boundaries and symbolic interactionism, and Juha Tuunainen of the University of Helsinki, Finland, on disciplinary boundaries within academic departments. Our keynote speaker was Joan H. Fujimura on the ethnographic deconstruction of racialized genomic categories, who discussed the hardening boundaries of race categories by some geneticists and social scientists in contrast with others who argue that social race categories do not map onto any genetic categories.

The conference organizers heartily thank the editors of the Qualitative Sociology Review (QSR) for graciously allowing their journal to highlight some of the papers from this conference, and I thank them for this space in which to honor how special this conference is, along with the participants who attend. Other special issues emerging from previous conference years include volume VIII, issue 1, and volume IX, issue 3. The editorial team has been supportive and generous with their expertise and time. QSR has become part of the cannon of qualitative research journals with an international reputation. The Qualitative Sociology Review remains committed to publishing important qualitative research from a wide range of perspectives, is completely free and open-access, and maintains solid standards of peer review. Indeed, this should be a model for other journals to follow in the growing future of electronically-mediated scholarly publishing.

This special issue includes a paper based on the featured talk, which Staci Newmahr delivered, a graduate student spotlight, and several papers from the regular sessions. While not all of these papers are directly about boundaries or theory around boundaries, they all engage on some level with the concept of boundaries and the roles that boundaries play (and are played with) in a variety of situations. I thank all those who submitted papers and increased the quality of the pool from which to choose (with difficulty) which papers to include.

The first paper is based on Staci Newmahr’s featured talk, entitled “Fine Lines: Classifying, Framing, and Policing Symbolic Interaction.” Newmahr takes a close look at how symbolic interactionists, and others, reflect their specific theoretical lens through the way scholars use verbs in the titles of their papers. She examines verbs which emphasize the role of the...
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The papers in this special issue reveal the diverse nature of the social construction of boundaries. They span a wide range of topics, including the experiences of retirement, adoption reunion, and the challenges faced by baby-boomer women. Each paper offers unique insights into how boundaries are constructed, maintained, transcended, and reconstituted in various contexts.

The first paper, entitled "Constructing the Boundaries of Retirement for Baby-Boomer Women: Like Turning Off the Tap, or Is It?" by van den Hoonaard, explores the experiences of baby-boomer women as they navigate the transition from work to retirement. This paper highlights the challenges and shifts in meaning around identity that baby-boomer women face.

Another paper, "Mobility Boundaries: Masculinizing Fatherhood in the Feminine Province of Parenting," by Hauser, examines how fathers actively masculinize their parenting in order to protect their masculine identity. This paper illustrates the importance of understanding the social construction of boundaries in shaping gender roles.

Finally, "Finding My Place: Birth Mothers Manage the Boundary Ambiguity of Adoption Reunion Contact" by Gouliquer and colleagues, explores the experiences of birth mothers in adoption reunions. This paper highlights the complex nature of boundaries in adoption, particularly in the context of essentialist definitions of motherhood.

The reviewers and authors have worked hard to produce papers of high quality, and the reviewers have provided valuable feedback to improve these papers. I must energetically and whole-heartedly thank the reviewers who made the time to advise and improve these papers, as well as the authors who, to a one, enthusiastically took up the comments of the reviewers and worked hard to produce papers not only fitting to the theme of this issue but also strong in style, methodology, readability, and variety.

Thank you also to the editors at Qualitative Sociology Review and the other organizers hope that this issue reveals the diverse nature of the Qualitative Analysis Conference and encourages readers to consider participating in future years.

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