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Introduction to the Special Issue

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

Lisa-Jo K. van den Scott is a postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Sociology, Research Studio for Narrative, Visual, and Digital Methods, Brock University, Canada. Her main interest is in a sociology of walls wherein she examines the experiences of space and place, identity, and knowledge transmission as intersectional and experienced in interaction with the walls and boundaries that shape how we move through our lives. She has worked with concepts of globalization among the Inuit through the lenses of Symbolic Interactionism and Science and Technology Studies, working with innovative qualitative and visual methodologies. She has published in *The Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *The American Behavioral Scientist*, *The Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics*, and *Sociology Compass*, in addition to several book chapters—all of which deal in some capacity with the relationship between people and the landscape of their lives; how they experience their everyday lives within their physical and social contexts, particularly in times of transition.

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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

researcher versus those which emphasize the experience of the participants as a key part of the answer to her oft repeated question “you might be a symbolic interactionist if...” This paper is delightfully playful and yet deeply insightful about the telling practices when we title our articles.

Next we turn a Graduate Student Spotlight onto Samantha Skinner’s paper “Mothering, Running, and the Renegotiation of Running Identity.” Skinner, an MA student, McMaster University, developed this paper from one originally written as an undergraduate thesis. In it, she identifies the ways in which the identity of “runner” and the identity of “mother” intersect and often interfere with each other. In questioning why fewer women run in the longer road races, despite their frequent presence in the shorter road races, she finds that mothers are redefining the boundary of what it means to be a “runner,” moving away from the traditional “disembodied runner” approach.

Following these highlights, we have five excellent papers, which emerged from conference presentations. First is Deborah K. van den Hoonaard’s paper, entitled “Constructing the Boundaries of Retirement for Baby-Boomer Women: Like Turning Off the Tap, or Is It?” Van den Hoonaard discussed the challenges and shifts in meaning around issues of retirement among older women. The baby-boomer women retiring today have had vastly different life experiences than women before. Van den Hoonaard finds that, when women retire, they navigate a number of key boundaries between full-time, paid and other work and between their own transitions and the transitions of others in their

lives. Developing a unique identity and finding new meaning as a retiree is a challenging process for baby-boomer women as they negotiate “lingering identities” to avoid crossing the identity boundary from professional to retired.

Second, Ninna Meier joined us from Denmark to present “Collaboration in Healthcare Through Boundary Work and Boundary Objects.” As she argues, in highly specialized, knowledge-intensive organizations, such as healthcare organizations, organizational, professional, and disciplinary boundaries mark the formal structure and division of work. Collaboration and coordination across these boundaries are essential to minimizing gaps in patient care, but also may be challenging to achieve in practice. Through her ethnographic study, Meier studies the negotiation of these boundaries in practice, on the ground, to see when these boundaries are reified and when they are more porous as health workers transmit vital information across disciplinary, ward, and hierarchical lines.

Third, Orlee Hauser’s paper, entitled “Maintaining Boundaries: Masculinizing Fatherhood in the Feminine Province of Parenting,” reveals the identity work fathers do to participate more actively in parenting while at the same time protecting their masculine identity. Those who fall into hegemonic notions of masculinity have few pre-existing father identities to choose from. Hauser argues that fathers actively masculinize their parenting in order to protect their masculine identities by stressing different areas of importance when it comes to parenting, such as adding masculine elements to their fathering activities, and by staying away from parenting activi-

ties that are generally marked by society as feminine. Her work shows that even when fathers share domestic labor, traditional gender roles often continue to influence how fathers frame their participation.

Fourth, Karen March tackles emotionally-charged adoption reunions in her paper, “Finding My Place: Birth Mothers Manage the Boundary Ambiguity of Adoption Reunion Contact.” When giving up a child for adoption, women must grapple with essentialist notions of motherhood. This influences adoption reunion outcomes. Collectively, the birth mothers perceived themselves to be the mothers of a child lost to them through adoption. Reunion contact, however, jeopardizes this perception when the adopted now-adults do not accept mothering overtures, not viewing their birth mothers as “mothers” in the essentialist definition. Continued contact means suppressing motherhood desires and identities and taking on a more peripheral or friend-like reunion role. March reveals the sometimes devastating challenges in adoption reunions with her sensitive and compassionate approach to her topic.

Finally, Lynne Gouliquer, Carmen Poulin, and Maryani Lesmana share with us “Mobility Boundaries Between Home, Community, and Beyond: Experiences of Exceptionally Old Adults Living in Eastern Canada.” With changing expectations around mobility, youthfulness, and aging, Gouliquer and colleagues delve into the lived expe-

rience of mobility for those over the age of 90 as they encounter mobility challenges in the face of a particularly neoliberal socio-economic political context. With the goals of reducing social boundaries and enhancing community mobility of older adults, based on the findings, Gouliquer and colleagues offer social policy recommendations from an interdisciplinary perspective including social and psychological aspects of mobility issues for the exceptionally old, reminding us to think of all different kinds of people in different stages of life when establishing even the most basic of services, such as public transit. They prompt us to recall the valuable assets found in the exceptionally old and I only hope that their findings influence my life experience should I be fortunate enough to reach the ages of their participants.

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 the *Qualitative Sociology Review*. I 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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van den Scott, Lisa-Jo K. 2015. “Introduction to the Special Issue. Qualitative Analysis Conference 2014: The Social Construction of Boundaries: Creating, Maintaining, Transcending, and Reconstituting Boundaries.” *Qualitative Sociology Review* 11(3):6-9. Retrieved Month, Year (http://www.qualitativesociologyreview.org/ENG/archive_eng.php).