



# Traditions and innovations in qualitative criminological research methods

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In recent years, qualitative research methods in criminology have experienced a notable resurgence. This is evidenced by various scholarly endeavors, including the publication of works such as *'Qualitative Research in Criminology: Cutting-Edge Methods'* (edited by Faria & Dodge, 2022), *'Liquid Criminology. Doing imaginative criminological research'* (edited by Hviid Jacobsen & Walklate, 2016), *'The Routledge Handbook of Qualitative Criminology'* (edited by Copes & Miller, 2015), *'Qualitative Research in Criminology'* (Treadwell, 2019). The establishment of journals such as *Qualitative Criminology* and initiatives like the *Working Group on Qualitative Research Methodologies and Epistemologies* at the European Society of Criminology, or the *Qualitative Research Network in Criminology & Criminal Justice* (QRN-CCJ) also signify a renewed recognition of the importance of qualitative approaches in understanding complex criminologically relevant phenomena. More recently, the CrimRxiv Consortium started a curation hub on qualitative criminology aimed at spotlighting studies based on non-numeric data.

Diverse criminological subfields such as global and green criminology, cultural criminology, and narrative criminology, have not only enriched our understanding of the respective topics but have also paved the way for innovative qualitative methodologies. Creative, reflexive and interventionist epistemologies and methodologies proved to be prerequisite, in order to imaginatively (Mills, 1959; Young, 2011)

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This is an editors' introduction to the special issue 'Traditions and innovations in qualitative research in criminology', edited by Rita Faria and Olga Petintseva.

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understand the contemporary social harms of dislocation, surveillance, incarceration, impoverishment, mind-numbing consumerism, experiences of uprooting and existential uncertainty, environmental degradation, global pandemics, the dynamics of social movements, and polarization. Moreover, research into the ever more present online world and online identities, the call for new approaches to data collection and analysis, the use of sensory methods, co-creation strategies, appeals to sensitivity to diversity and reflexivity from researchers - all of this has influenced greatly the panorama in qualitative research, particularly so in the study of crime and deviance, victimization and harm, crime control and related topics.

However, despite many innovations, qualitative researchers continue to grapple with numerous challenges. This includes navigating ethical considerations and the relatively recent data protection regulations, accessing and recruiting participants for studies on sensitive topics, and overcoming difficulties in publishing (Dodge & Parker, 2023). Qualitative research remains labor-intensive and requires tailor-made approaches. Numbers still push policy, the field of criminology still suffers from ‘methodological fetisjism’ and is easily seduced by actuarial tendencies, in which dominant research methods contribute to mystification of social realities and the politics of everyday life (Ferrell, 2009; Young, 2011). To complement knowledge produced employing rather detached methods of criminological inquiry, the aim of qualitative approaches is to foreground meaning, performance, unpredictability, engagement, reflexivity, creativity and, eventually, progressive transformations. Of course, such approaches exhibit great variation across different subfields, epistemological traditions, and geographical contexts. This diversity highlights the need to critically interrogate familiar epistemological frameworks and research agendas shaped by Global-North perspectives. Therefore, this special issue of *Crime Law and Social Change* focuses on qualitative research ‘from the periphery.’

By periphery, we refer not only to marginalized topics and populations within criminological discourse but also to innovative methodological approaches and underrepresented geographic traditions. The collection of papers featured in this special issue embodies this commitment to exploring the ‘periphery’ of qualitative criminological research, explicitly offering broadly relevant methodological insights, drawing on authors’ research experiences. More subtly, it also intends to red flag the peripheric interest that scientific journals have in qualitative research.

The first paper, *A farewell to the lone hero researcher: Team research and writing*, Sveinung Sandberg and Lucero Ibarra Rojas challenge the archetype of the lone hero researcher and advocate for collaborative approaches to qualitative research. Drawing upon their experiences in Mexico and Norway, the authors argue for the importance of team research and writing, as a means of addressing power differentials and promoting diversity.

In *Rich scholar, poor scholar: inequalities in research capacity, “knowledge” abysses, and the value of unconventional approaches to research* David Rodriguez Goyes and May-Len Skilbrei examine material inequalities in research capacity and propose unconventional approaches to data collection. Their paper highlights the global disparities in knowledge production and advocates for innovative methods that democratize access to meaningful data, using examples from their research in Colombia and Russia.

Janeille Zorina Matthews' contribution titled *Creating the Demand for Better Crime Policy: Qualitative Frame Analysis as a Vehicle for Social Transformation* explores the potential of Qualitative Frame Analysis (QFA) as a tool for shaping crime discourse and informing policy. By analyzing framing strategies in Antigua and Barbuda, Matthews demonstrates the transformative power of qualitative methodologies in challenging dominant narratives.

In *Ethnographic semantics and documentary method in criminology. A combination of reconstructive approaches using the example of Municipal Law Enforcement Services* Ina Hennen introduces the documentary method and ethnographic semantics as two complementary approaches, based on her research with German Municipal Law Enforcement Services. Through an ethnomethodological design, Hennen illustrates how these methodologies deepen our understanding of security practices in public spaces.

Next, in their *Mapmaking as visual storytelling: The movement and emotion of managing sex work in the urban landscape*, Sara Jordenö and Amber Horning-Ruf foreground visual storytelling methods. Their interdisciplinary approach combines psychogeography and mapmaking to elucidate the emotional and spatial dynamics of sex work in urban landscapes, offering insights into the lived experiences and social relations of sex workers.

Finally, an original approach is presented in Lorenzo Natali's *The social perception of environmental victimization. A visual and sensory methodological proposal*. Natali proposes a visual and sensory methodology for studying environmental victimization, highlighting the perspectives of those affected by environmental harm and employs photo elicitation and itinerant soliloquy to deepen our understanding and challenge familiar perspectives.

The reality in which we set up our inquiries is ever evolving and so does the need to understand and respond to the current complexities of crime, control, conflicts, and threats. From the specter of totalitarianism to the existential threat of global warming, radicalization, and the challenges of artificial intelligence, the current sociopolitical landscape underscores the urgency of mobilizing engaged qualitative research to understand and address pressing issues. The ever-shifting nature of current social, political, and technological phenomena needs to be addressed by qualitative methods which, by their nature, are especially well-suited to offer new theories and explanations based on detailed and nuanced accounts of complex phenomena. In that sense, discussions of critical and creative qualitative methodologies such as the ones presented in this special issue serve, in the first place, as meeting spaces for researchers working on seemingly distant topics, as fora for addressing epistemological and ethical questions and reimagining the boundaries of qualitative criminological research. Only last and least as mere methodological-technical discussions.

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