



Qualitative Research SIG NEWSLETTER

Fall 2025



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Letter from the Chair

Hello QRSIG Colleagues!

Welcome to the last couple months of 2025! I hope you had fabulous summers and falls and are looking forward to a well-deserved winter break.

The Executive Committee has been hard at work continuing existing initiatives including our annual awards -- Outstanding Dissertation, Book Award, and Egon G. Guba lecture; mentoring programs – proposal review, mentoring session, and AERA office hours; graduate student committee – reading and writing groups and webinars, and more!

We are also kicking off new initiatives including re-starting the Podcast Committee (be on the lookout for upcoming podcast posts), focus-group-like think tanks by the Research Committee, and partnerships with other SIGs for recruitment and organizing.

While I didn't plan this, ensuring the QR SIG has a healthy budget has topped my list of goals as Chair. I'm happy to share that this year we are on track to stay within our budget while increasing our funding for the graduate student travel award by \$1000, in line with our priorities. This is despite a healthy increase in SIG dues to AERA, which we emailed you all about in July. We offset AERA's dues increase by raising our regular member dues from \$15 to \$20. We are grateful to our members who shared their feedback on the proposed increases and their generosity.

The QR SIG Executive committee meets monthly, and I want our membership to know that we are concerned and discussing both issues related to funding (we know many of our members are finding conferences increasingly out of reach due to university budget and grant cuts, plus there's inflation...) and the US federal and state governments' anti-DEI stances and policies, and university prohibitions (we've noticed a decrease in critically oriented submissions to the SIG and wonder if that's an AERA-wide phenomenon). We are exploring and planning ways to support and highlight our members' much-needed, ongoing critical work and agendas. Please be on the lookout for opportunities to share your thoughts and ideas with us.

We have three important positions up for election this year – Chair, Program Co-Chair, and Secretary – and our candidates are all valuable members of the QR SIG community. I hope you will consider them carefully and cast your votes when AERA sends out the January ballots.

I hope to see you at AERA in Los Angeles next year! From my conversations with them, I know the Program Co-Chairs have put together another vibrant program, thanks of course to the many high quality and provocative paper and session proposals they received. I encourage you to read through the rest of the newsletter, which contains more information from the QR SIG and creative contributions from our qualitative colleagues. Many thanks to the two Newsletter Editors and all other newsletter contributors!

Yours,
Jennifer Wolgemuth



Methods Notes

The qualitative “themes” generated by AI often become generic, providing descriptive rather than interpretive findings (Hamilton et al., 2023; Morgan, 2023). While AI may produce volumes of text, it minimizes experiential connection with illusions of understanding including explanatory depth, exploratory breadth, and objectivity (Messeri & Crockett, 2024). Using a quantitative metaphor, this analysis might be labeled a “regression towards mediocrity,” now known as “regression towards the mean,” (Bland, 2017, p. 442), which Francis Galton (1886), an early proponent of eugenics, defined as extreme observations of a random variable that tend to be followed by values closer to its mean. This illustrates the epistemic risk of monocultures of knowing (Messeri & Crockett, 2024). These generic outputs create a structural opacity, loss of experiential connection, as well as shape readers’ epistemic environments.

AI epistemic systems are “black boxes,” and function opaquely due to the complexity within their machinic learning models (Fleisher, 2022). Researchers attempt to alleviate the opacity by discussing these systems “in terms of transparency, interpretability, and explainability” (Fleisher, 2022, p. 534); however, these systems’ output lack an affective capacity as they operate through programmed responses rather than autonomous, embodied, encounters (Fleisher, 2022; Massumi, 2025). In addition, these responses avoid uniqueness, professing truth within a searchable universe. Instead of Massumi’s (2025) “man-standard,” a “masculinist machine” (p. 44). I propose an “AI standard” that buries the uniqueness of qualitative inquiry.

These consequences of the “AI standard” diminishes affective intensity and the unique experiential connection from participants to readers, as the virtual “cannot be felt, it cannot but be felt” (Massumi, 2021, p. 132). This digital reduction of the affective embodied experience to computational processes divorces bodily sensation and environmental interaction (Massumi, 2021). There is a diminishment of pure potential that underlies a creative becoming, replaced by programmed responses rather than autonomous, embodied encounters with the data. AI might simulate emotional outputs, but it does not create the autonomous, involuntary dimension of affect that Massumi (2021) sees as fundamental to the genuine experience of sensory engagement.

In addition, AI orchestrates atmospheres, a shaping affect through algorithms. Networks of connections are “nodal,” channeling users to media that confirm their existing ideas within “echo chambers” (Bouvier & Rasmussen, 2022, p. 7). These shape what we encounter even before we know what we’re looking for, modulating moods, desires, and rhythms of attention (Massumi, 2021).

Despite these epistemic risks, there are methodological implications for qualitative research. Bhattacharya (2025) proposes that researchers should not use AI software autocoding or doing “themeing,” and researchers must engage in the “last mile” work (Cabitza et al., 2020). However, researchers need to address the affective attunement to participants’ accounts, counterbalancing the “regression toward the mean” tendencies of AI-generated content. On the other hand, there is a possibility of an “affective counter-ontopower”—an alternative modulation of potential that doesn’t rely on fear, but cultivates emergent potential (Massumi, 2015). We need to preserve the situated, affective, dimensions of qualitative inquiry within the new paradigm of AI.

Carol Isaac, Mercer University

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PDC - An Introduction to Qualitative Thematic Analysis

On June 3, 2025, Johnny Saldaña presented a 4-hour online mini-course, "An Introduction to Qualitative Thematic Analysis," for AERA's Professional Development's Virtual Research Learning Series. The course enrolled 601 participants, and a recording of the event will soon be available for purchase on AERA's Professional Development webpage:

<https://www.aera.net/2025VRLS>. The course surveyed thematic analysis methods for qualitative research projects. Participants explored coding as an optional precursor for theme development and analyzed data sets through two thematic approaches: categorically and phenomenologically. Participants gained experience through these course activities and objectives: 1. define and differentiate selected analytic terms: code, category, pattern, and theme; 2. explore the construction and transition processes from codes to categories; 3. explore the construction and transition processes from codes and categories to themes; 4. summarize and interpret data excerpts into two thematic forms: categorical and phenomenological; 5. render themes as a visual model; and 6. discuss how the course's principles may transfer to future research projects.

Johnny Saldaña, Arizona State University

Invisible Illness Warriors Health Collective – a found poem, using the language of Gipsy Hosking

Knowledge production is never a neutral act
disabled, sick, mad, stupid, disordered

Excluded

Women

Excluded

We share experiences of:

exclusion, oppression, marginalization, disablism...ableism

heteronormativity, neurotypicality, able-bodiedness

Assumed

the Body is story in time and space

find Meaning in the experience transform Identify

enhance Self-Consciousness
an Ethical and Reflexive approach
a Rejection of the dualistic (subject-object) binary

one way Power can be shared is through the process of co-research
lived experience comes [with] Insider Knowledge
“Insider”
the labor of participation:
group participant and group facilitator –
participants trust me to understand their needs and believe them without question.

the university refused
“...just get healthier participants...”
taxi vouchers and bus tickets using my own money
Padded chairs, natural lighting, a restroom, a bed
I invited everyone to bring along a Support Person.
it was my own responsibility:
make the research process accessible for Me.

Center the ethics of social justice
Center the lived experience and insider knowledges of participants
Refus[e] to take the position of an authoritative Knower.

Invisible Illness Warriors Health Collective
Allies in both research and practice.

I invite able-bodied people to explore their own able-bodied privilege.
Consider:
how to enable participation for All
who else may be unintentionally LEFT OUT of your research.

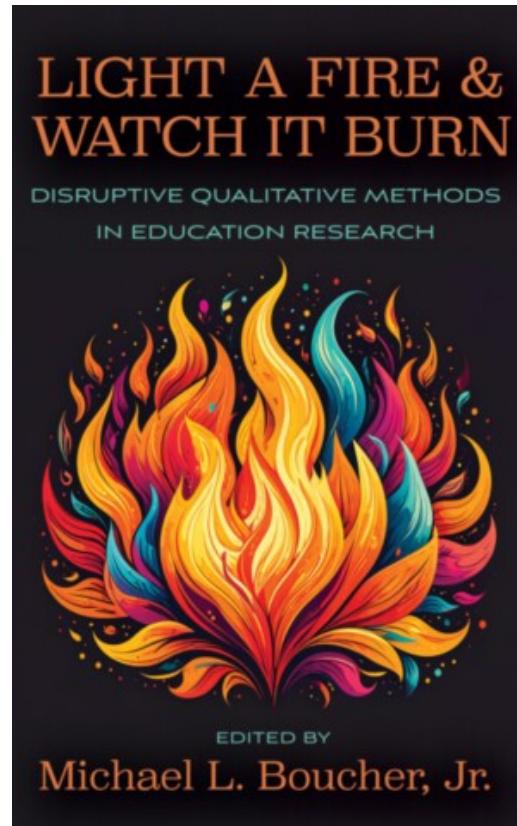
People are experts in their Own Lives.

Jessica J Earley, Coastal Carolina University

Light a Fire and Watch it Burn is available now!

Light a Fire and Watch It Burn: Disruptive Qualitative Methods in Education Research revolutionizes how qualitative research is conceptualized, taught, and practiced. Edited by Michael L. Boucher, Jr., Ph.D., this groundbreaking collection of essays by emerging and established scholars introduces equity-centered, justice-oriented methodologies designed to challenge entrenched systems of power and privilege. With a focus on amplifying marginalized voices and fostering transformative social action, this book offers an inspiring, accessible resource for educators, researchers, and graduate students. Traditional qualitative research texts provide invaluable foundations for understanding methods such as participant observation, coding, and analysis. Yet, they often fail to address innovative approaches that challenge oppressive norms and center lived experiences of marginalized communities. Light a Fire and Watch It Burn fills this critical gap, presenting 15 concise, practice-oriented chapters on disruptive methods, including photovoice, duoethnography, feminist critical discourse analysis, and arts-based research like ethnodrama. These approaches reimagine qualitative inquiry as a vehicle for equity, inclusion, and justice, equipping readers with tools to create meaningful change. Each chapter follows a consistent structure, making the book an ideal supplement for qualitative research courses. Readers will find clear explanations of the methodologies, their theoretical foundations, and how they disrupt systems of oppression while empowering participants. Practical examples, discussion questions, and curated lists of further readings encourage deep reflection and active engagement. This structure ensures seamless integration into weekly lessons for master's and doctoral students, while also serving as a reference for scholars seeking to expand their methodological repertoire. From exploring anticolonial ethics to embracing culturally responsive frameworks like 'Ōiwi methodologies and Pláticas, the book highlights the potential of qualitative research to humanize and transform. Contributors share personal narratives and research experiences that illuminate how these methodologies foster trust, amplify silenced voices, and dismantle academic hierarchies. The metaphor of "lighting a fire" reflects the catalytic potential of these methods to spark curiosity, disrupt traditional paradigms, and ignite transformative social action, while "watching it burn" underscores the boldness and urgency of these practices in reimagining education research.

Accessible, inspiring, and deeply rooted in critical theory, *Light a Fire and Watch It Burn* is an essential companion for students and educators who dare to confront power and reimagine research as a tool for justice. It challenges readers to move beyond the safe confines of traditional methods and embrace innovative practices that center humanity, equity, and resilience. Whether you are a graduate student beginning your journey, a scholar seeking to disrupt academic norms, or an educator looking for practical tools to inspire your students, this book provides the guidance and vision needed to reshape qualitative research—and, ultimately, the world it seeks to understand. *Light a Fire and Watch It Burn* is not just a book; it is a call to action for those ready to create a more inclusive, equitable future through research.



Michael L. Boucher, Jr., Texas A&M University-San Antonio



Carlson Coogler's QR SIG Dissertation Award Speech 2025

Carlson H. Coogler, who is currently Assistant Professor at Baylor University, was delighted to receive the QR SIG's Outstanding Dissertation Award in 2025. In her speech, she shares a little bit about her dissertation, focusing on the intertwined question(s): What is (your) methodology?, the concept of methodological literacies, and the value of difference for multidimensional meaning-making.

[Click here to read](#) or scan the QR code



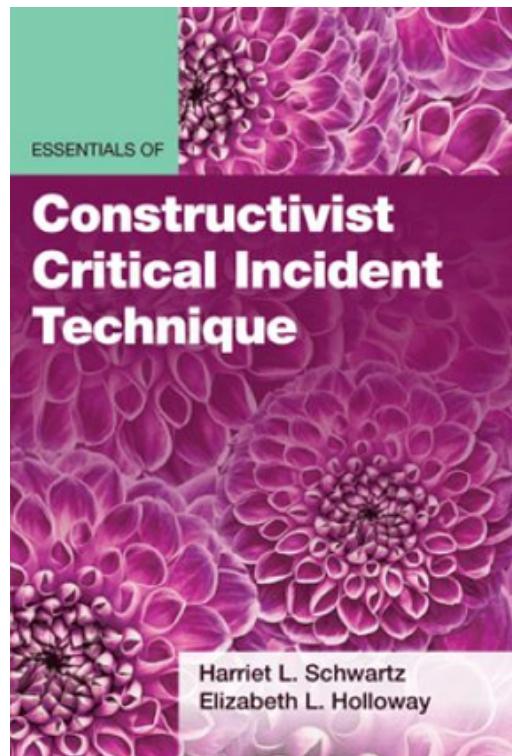
Publication Announcement

Critical Incident Technique (CIT) is a valuable addition to the qualitative researcher's repertoire. CIT positions researchers to explore how people make meaning of their experience through the lens of related critical or significant incidents. Distinct from other qualitative methods, CIT focuses on specific moments or experiences, their antecedents and outcomes.

Variations on CIT also provide valuable approaches to self-assessment and seeking student or program participant feedback. Developed in the 1940s by John Flanagan and colleagues, CIT was originally a positivist method wherein data was collected by observation. Over time, researchers working from post-positivist, constructivist, and interpretive epistemologies have evolved the method which now typically features interviewing as the primary approach to gathering data.

Essentials of Constructivist Critical Incident Technique provides a history and overview of CIT and the first full articulation of a constructivist approach to the method. The authors offer a step-by-step guide to designing a trustworthy CIT study, collecting and interpreting data, presenting findings, and crafting an article for publication. Faculty can regulate the scope of a CIT project, making the method appropriate not only for master's and doctoral courses/theses/dissertations, but also for advanced undergraduate research classes. Constructivist CIT is intuitive, flexible, and structured – a good fit for novice as well as experienced researchers.

Harriet L. Schwartz, Antioch University

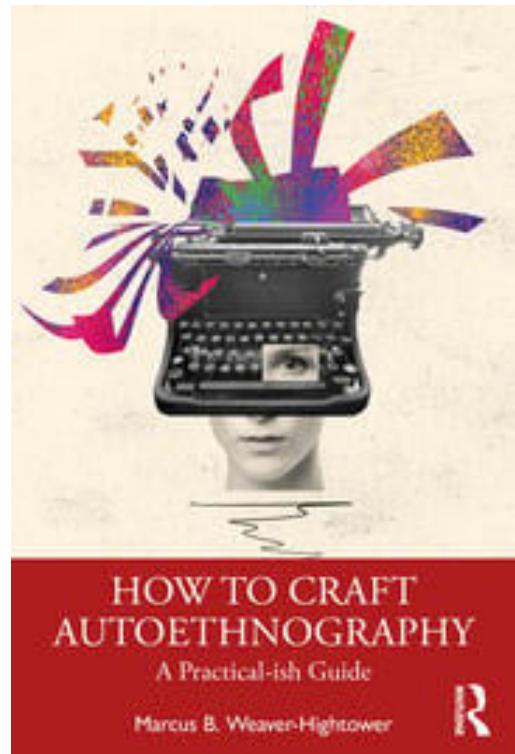


Our Spatial Orientation: Positionality, Relationality, and Learning Through the Body

Components of place and sites of where we know from are pertinent to positionality, particularly in its importance for education research with and for communities. However, conversations discussing the relations of place a researcher brings to their work are limited. In this conceptual paper, I center and build with the contributions of Black geographies as both a theoretical and methodological shift to consider spatial orientations and the spatial knowledge we bring to qualitative inquiry, connecting our prior time in spaces to our current approaches. Relations to space through Black spatial knowledge, imagination, futures, and carceralities are core features that frame how we come to understand “where we know from.” Boveda and Annamma provide an approach to positioning attending to “(1) the onto-epistemic that recognizes how embodied experiences shape understandings of intersectional oppressions, (2) the sociohistorical that engages historicity, and (3) the sociocultural that concedes whiteness and ability as property” (p. 310). My experience is framed through these theories by adding an explicit spatial dimension to detail curricular inquiry guided by Blackness, decoloniality, and disability justice. This piece aims to provide insight and approach to learning from our bodies and their interactions with places we have been to as a process to engage our positionality. Black geographies coupled with disability justice approaches to curriculum design and inquiry allows us to reshape and reorganize geographies through pedagogies that position us to learn the world anew. This approach also provides a perspective that centers Blackness as a means of disrupting coloniality through identifying the role of place (and spatial beliefs) in pedagogy and learning. This promotes the remembering of carrying places across time as we come to teach, build, cultivate, and research. I argue cultivating spatial relations and knowledge—core to community research and qualitative inquiry—provides new possibilities for disrupting geographical power dynamics and emplacing knowledge of place in our research process.

Kaleb Germinaro, University of Illinois Chicago

In *How to Craft Autoethnography: A Practical-ish Guide*, I offer a comprehensive guide to the art and science of doing autoethnography. I aim to provide a resource that is both theoretically grounded and practical, and a structured yet adaptable framework for producing rigorous, resonant autoethnographic work. Throughout the book, I discuss the core elements of autoethnographic research: when the method is most appropriate (and when it is not), how to generate and analyze data, and how to assess an autoethnography's quality and ethics. I explore the major genres of autoethnography—evocative, analytic, critical, and arts-based/performative—and illustrate each with examples and exemplars. In the more applied chapters, I outline strategies for designing studies, generating data through reflection and memory work, engaging with social theory, and crafting writing that speaks to audiences both within and beyond the academy. Includes pedagogical features for instructors or anyone who just wants to practice.

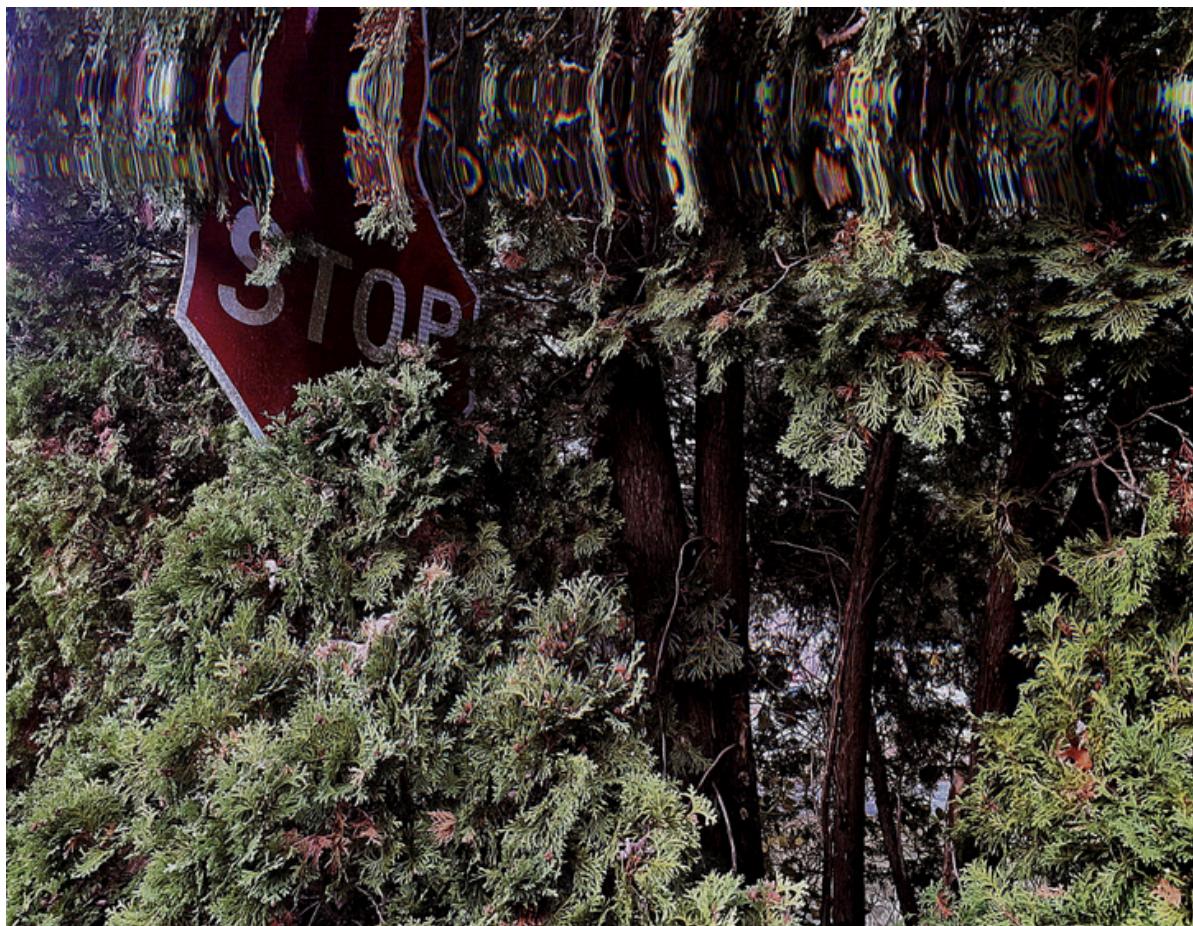


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Marcus Weaver-Hightower, Virginia Tech

Qualitative Opportunities

The Qualitative Research Graduate Student Committee welcomes anyone interested in joining our book club for the fall semester. This is a chance to meet in community and dive deep into qualitative methods with a diverse group of scholars. No previous experience with qual research is needed- all levels are welcome. This semester, we will be reading *Intersectional Qualitative Research* by Jennifer Esposito and Venus Evans-Winters. Published in 2021, the book is aimed at those interested in qualitative research and follows the intersectional research process from conception to completion. The book is a recipient of a 2022 Most Promising New Textbook Award from the Textbook & Academic Authors Association. Our first meeting will be held on Monday, October 20th at 12:00pm EST, with additional meetings planned for November and December. You do not need to read prior to our first meeting! You can register to attend here: tx.ag/aeraqrsiggsbookclub



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