

The unspoken of survey reports



Call for papers

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Survey reports involve being able to put words to experiences, to make lived experience describable (Breton, 2018). Yet, there are experiences and interactions that are struck by the taboo and from which silences emerge. Observation and interviews are the result of negotiations and adaptations to the field that are sometimes far from academic methodological expectations (Fine, 1993). It is a matter of dealing with «a succession of manipulations and adjustments» (Demazière, 2008, p. 31) that go beyond the scientific framework and touch on the emotional and relational domains of the researcher. In an article on neutrality in the research interview, Jean-Baptiste Legavre highlighted «a gap between most of the theoretical reflections on the research interview method and the reality of a person's practice» (Lagrave, 1996, p. 207). This call for papers in the Bulletin of Sociological Methodology reflects a similar sense of discrepancy regarding the unspoken aspects of our survey reports. The researcher, confronted with his field, cannot aim at methodological exhaustiveness concerning the collection of data and determine upstream what must - and, to a lesser extent, what must not - be collected. Some of these data are not included in the reports. They are, however, part of the social reality observed, and sometimes central to understanding a phenomenon.

To speak of these unspoken aspects is to bring to light situations that are obvious to the researcher, but of which the reader is unaware. It is also, and above all, to speak of all the disturbances that can interfere with the work of investigation itself and possibly with the type of publication that will follow. Unspoken issues arise from stakes and tensions within the process of research, whether it is the researcher facing his or her field (Powdermaker, 1967, Jedlicki, 2016), himself or herself (Ellis, Bochner, 2015), those around him or her (Krieger, 1985), or the academic community (Caratini, 2013, Cervera-Marzal, 2023). If the unspoken elements are numerous in the methodological and epistemological questions, it is perhaps because they reveal a part of the researcher's intimacy and shed light on the relationship with the research field. This relationship affects different aspects: affective, emotional (of fear, seduction, taboo), professional, which constitute as much the identity of the researcher as his relation to the social world on which he investigates: «Obviously, researchers refrain from most of the behaviours that would put their lives in serious danger, that would lead them to prison, or that would make them pariahs in their professional environment; if need be, they keep silent about what could lead them to justice or provoke the reprobation of their colleagues» (Bizeul, 2007, p. 79). Far from being restricted to so-called qualitative surveys, the issue of the unspoken also concerns questionnaire-based surveys, which involve commissioners, rely on a hierarchy of tasks, and employ precarious employees (Peneff, 1988; Caveng, 2012).

The unveiling of the unspoken is important, even decisive, for understanding the very process of the investigation, of the relationship with the other in the field, and of the analysis. What do they tell us about our relation to research, but also about our link to the world as researchers and ordinary humans? The unspoken elements in the reports of investigations come from this «art of improvisation» (Bourdieu et al., 1968, p. 57), in other words, from a type of reasoned improvisation that is not only a pedagogical and scientific capital, but also relational and emotional.

Well beyond general reflections, this issue is intended to receive original and personal proposals, calling upon defined situations. In this sense, this issue does not focus on the question of difficult fields alone, but wishes to investigate the unspoken aspects of research reports. Not revealing certain aspects can imply that the researcher has made himself or herself discreditable (Leap, 1996; Behard, 2016). Misrepresenting oneself or one's interviewees, especially when what is said transgresses the protection of confidentiality, restricts the use of certain data that are nonetheless constitutive of the research experience (Caveng, Darbus, 2016) and the social world surrounding us (Johnson, 1977; Rodgers, 2007). What does the researcher bring into play from his or her own experiences and what is the result? What blind spots remain unnoticed, sometimes for years, leading to a distorted view and analysis?

We can identify several elements that imply unspoken material in survey reports. First, it is sometimes directly the field that brings up the researcher's own tenuous experience from his or her journey (Rosaldo, 1989; Hochschild, 2012). It is then necessary to question one's own subjectivity as a researcher, and one's position between one's individuality and one's different statuses. The relationship with one's field is also central to the research process: what can the researcher say or not say about his or her respondents without running the risk of having the gates to his or her object of investigation closed? (Bruneteaux, 2018) Beyond anonymity, it is also the requirement of confidentiality that the researcher must take into account (Béliard, Eideliman, 2008). Academic expectations may also come into play. Accusations of miserabilism or populism in academic fields refer in part to a specific composition and expectations of this community which, ultimately, influences what is said or not (Bizeul, 2010). Conversely, would these unsaid elements not lead one to consider only the negative or miserable aspects of one's field by erasing the rest of the prevailing social reality (Fassin, 2013)?

Lastly, tensions linked to the unspoken may appear between the researcher and his non-academic entourage (family, spouse, friends). There is then an additional work of reflection and selection of certain elements related to attraction (Rabinow, 1977), repulsion (Kulick et al., 1995; Patarin-Jossec, 2020) or fear in relation to one's field and respondents (Wax, 1971). This is particularly the case for women, especially young women, non-white people, or, conversely, white people, depending on the environment surveyed. This is also the case for differences in background, education, and worldview, which are sources of discomfort or avoidance that are often left in the shadows. These elements seem to touch on the affect as much as on the self-image and the relationship with the other, which means that one keeps - or has to keep - to oneself elements which, however, could be decisive for the veracity of the account and for a rigorous analysis of the phenomena.

Scientific coordination of the issue

The issue will be coordinated by **Clément Reversé** (CED)

Terms of submission

Authors wishing to submit an article on this issue should address, before **30/04/2023**, their abstract (5,000 signs including spaces, excluding bibliography), an indicative bibliography (less than 15 references) and a short presentation of each author to the following e-mail address: clement.reverse@u-bordeaux.fr

For any further information, you can directly contact the coordinator of the issue at the following e-mail address: clement.reverse@u-bordeaux.fr

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