
Guest editorial: Embracing alterity, reflexivity and passion in research

Qualitative
Research in
Organizations and
Management: An
International
Journal

373

Ann Cunliffe organized the first International Qualitative Research in Management and Organizations (QRM) conference in 2008 in honor of the 20th anniversary of John Van Maanen's 1988 book *Tales of the Field*. Afterward, Ann co-organized the conference with multiple collaborators, including Karen Locke, Rafael Alcadiyani and Stephen Linstead, every two years until 2023, with the exception of a pandemic pause. Following the first four of these conferences, Ann also co-edited special issues of this journal based on papers that were presented at the conference and related to multiple themes: Telling Tales (2009); Reimagining Method (2011); Embodiment, Imagination and Meaning (2013); and Subjectivity, Difference and Method (2016).

After co-organizing her seventh conference in 2023, Ann announced her retirement and asked us to organize the QRM conference moving forward. As scholars who have been attending QRM since we were graduate students and for whom the conference has been instrumental in the development of our scholarly careers, it was with great humility and enthusiasm that we accepted. As such, we co-organized the eighth QRM conference in April 2025 in the enchanting location where it has always been held: Albuquerque, New Mexico.

To honor Ann's legacy of founding the QRM conference and opening pathways for doing critical, thought-provoking and reflexive research, we invited her as one of our two keynote speakers and selected a conference theme that highlights a central theme of her work: embracing alterity, reflexivity and passion in qualitative research (Cunliffe, 2003, 2018). At its core, embracing alterity in research means celebrating difference and non-conformity in a way that enables us to follow our passions to explore new possibilities, questions and ways of relating. Embracing alterity is consistent with reflexive research practices, which entail critically interrogating one's positionalities and assumptions about the nature of reality and knowledge, as well as understanding research as a deeply relational, embodied and emotional endeavor.

Helena Liu's body of work also engages extensively with the concepts of alterity, reflexivity and passion by showing that embracing these concepts can enable us to speak out against "the diverse and continuous pressures for epistemic obedience" (Liu, 2019, p. 33), which is vital for furthering the aims of equality, engaging in anti-racist and decolonial research practices and interrogating the pervasive whiteness of management and organization studies (Liu, 2022). At a time when scholars around the world have increasingly experienced threats to academic freedom and more pressure to conform to established traditions, it was with tremendous enthusiasm that we invited Helena to the 2025 QRM conference as a keynote speaker.

The eleven articles included in this special issue engage with alterity, reflexivity and passion in multiple ways and, in so doing, work towards the goals articulated by Ann and Helena in their work. The special issue begins with a moving piece in which Górski and Kostera (2026) explore how they have navigated the loss of their mentor Barbara Czarniawska, whose remarkable career and legacy have also contributed greatly to opening up pathways for doing organizational research differently (Sahlin, 2024). Through both



Authors' note: This editorial is submitted to *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal* as an introduction to the special issue on Embracing Alterity, Reflexivity, and Passion in Research. Please address correspondence to Jamie McDonald, Department of Communication, University of Texas at San Antonio.

Qualitative Research in Organizations
and Management: An International
Journal
Vol. 21 No. 3, 2026
pp. 373-376
© Emerald Publishing Limited
e-ISSN: 1746-5656
p-ISSN: 1746-5648
DOI 10.1108/QROM-10-2026-022

collaborative autoethnography and vertical ethnography, they show how Barbara's absence continues to linger in their writing as an abiding presence.

The issue continues with a playful piece by [Stratton \(2026\)](#), who delightfully enacts alterity, reflexivity and passion in ways that are unusual and refreshing in the pages of an academic journal. The performative, resistant essay evokes a courtroom drama to explore how readers act as "jurors" and co-construct the meaning of texts.

In their exploration of challenges navigating access to a research site, [Villanueva et al. \(2026\)](#) use an autoethnographic approach to critique insider positionality. Their article examines how researchers with insider access experience both advantages and challenges in accessing research participants. The authors argue that while familiarity can promote initial access, it also involves barriers to trust, expectations and privacy among participants.

In their contribution to the special issue, [Scarduzio et al. \(2026\)](#) explore visceral imprints in fieldwork – that is, moments in fieldwork that are deeply felt in the body, both physically and emotionally and that continue to have residual responses over time. By drawing on their extensive fieldwork in settings such as municipal courtrooms, airport security checkpoints, non-profit youth sports organizations and health clinics, they identify and reflect on five characteristics of visceral fieldwork: emotional complexity, temporal resistance, lack of control, intensity and transformation.

In their essay about "beautiful and good research," [Gambirasio et al. \(2026\)](#) use vignettes from action projects in Italian welfare organizations to reflect on how research can respond to the complexity of lived experience while engaging with ethical and methodological tensions. Their essay creatively challenges positivist assumptions embedded in how we craft and evaluate research, instead proposing more "situatedness," reciprocity, and co-generation of knowledge.

Next, [Plourde \(2026\)](#) contributes a provocative piece that explicitly aims to move readers through affect rather than simply through the mind. By presenting a deeply moving personal narrative that interweaves her relationship with her dying mother and humanity's relationship with the planet in light of multiple environmental crises, she challenges disembodied academic norms through affective storytelling.

In her contribution, [Dean \(2026\)](#) presents an evocative autoethnography that challenges the notion that engaging in reflexivity is a neutral practice that everyone experiences in the same way. Specifically, she explores the risks that neurodivergent scholars may face when they disclose information about themselves and how the tension between visibility and safety is negotiated.

Centering passion for "place" and community organizing, [Franklin \(2026\)](#) demonstrates how a grassroots organization leveraged intensive positive feelings towards a space to unite community members in resisting corporate-led redevelopment. Using autoethnography and archival data, [Franklin \(2026\)](#) reflexively highlights the importance of local identity, community engagement and grassroots action in successful urban renewal.

In a provocative analysis of workplace eating norms, [Plunkett \(2026\)](#) employs metaphor analysis to assess workplace norms and coworker communication about eating at work. The essay demonstrates how eating at work becomes a source of tension, judgment and diminished dignity when organizational control extends beyond formal rules into employees' personal habits.

Next, [Pyatovskaya \(2026\)](#) contributes a piece that explores how combining positive deviance case selection with formative influences timeline methods can advance the ways in which organizational resilience can be understood. In particular, she shows how combining these methods helps put the concepts of difference and reflexivity at the forefront of organizational resilience research.

Finally, [Ingold and Lee \(2026\)](#) reconceptualize focus groups as collaborative spaces where knowledge emerges through dialogue, disagreement and shared reflection rather than simply collecting individual opinions. Their case study of 56 organizational experiences of employing

unemployed individuals in Australia shows that relational focus groups can strengthen both research quality and communities of practice by fostering collective learning.

As Ann Cunliffe has stated, despite challenges that qualitative researchers can face as they push the boundaries of the field and challenge mainstream conventions, “We CAN be human, we CAN theorize with sensitivity and sensibility, with our bodies, our hearts and our emotions in ways that resonate with others” (Cunliffe, 2022, p. 22). Together, the articles in this special issue demonstrate that doing research in this way is not only possible, but can make incredibly meaningful and significant contributions to our understanding of the social world and organizing practices. We also look forward to future QRM conferences (qrmconf.org) where participants are invited to continue to push the boundaries of the field by embracing alterity, reflexivity and passion in research.

Jamie McDonald

The University of Texas, San Antonio, Texas, USA, and

Shawna Malvini Redden

California State University, Sacramento, California, USA

References

- Cunliffe, A.L. (2003), “Reflexive inquiry in organizational research: questions and possibilities”, *Human Relations*, Vol. 56 No. 8, pp. 983-1003, doi: [10.1177/00187267030568004](https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267030568004).
- Cunliffe, A.L. (2018), “Alterity: the passion, politics, and ethics of self and scholarship”, *Management Learning*, Vol. 49 No. 1, pp. 8-22, doi: [10.1177/1350507617737454](https://doi.org/10.1177/1350507617737454).
- Cunliffe, A.L. (2022), “Must I grow a pair of balls to theorize about theory in organization and management studies?”, *Organization Theory*, Vol. 3 No. 3, doi: [10.1177/26317877221109277](https://doi.org/10.1177/26317877221109277).
- Dean, L. (2026), “Nothing about us without us: the politics of outing in academia”, *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, Vol. 21 No. 3, pp. 486-498, doi: [10.1108/QROM-06-2025-3065](https://doi.org/10.1108/QROM-06-2025-3065).
- Franklin, R.J. (2026), “Sometimes you can fight city hall: how a grassroots organization’s passion for place helped spur place-based revitalization of an urban downtown”, *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, Vol. 21 No. 3, pp. 499-517, doi: [10.1108/QROM-07-2025-3104](https://doi.org/10.1108/QROM-07-2025-3104).
- Gambirasio, M., Toscano, A., Ivaldi, S. and Scaratti, G. (2026), “Toward beautiful and good research: crossing the production of generative knowledge”, *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, Vol. 21 No. 3, pp. 449-466, doi: [10.1108/QROM-07-2025-3103](https://doi.org/10.1108/QROM-07-2025-3103).
- Górska, A.M. and Kostera, M. (2026), “Writing with the present absent: an autoethnography with/without Barbara Czarniawska”, *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, Vol. 21 No. 3, pp. 377-396, doi: [10.1108/QROM-04-2025-3003](https://doi.org/10.1108/QROM-04-2025-3003).
- Ingold, J. and Lee, Q.Y. (2026), “When you don’t have all the answers: the value of relational focus groups as knowledge-making spaces in organization and management research”, *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, Vol. 21 No. 3, pp. 560-580, doi: [10.1108/QROM-07-2025-3101](https://doi.org/10.1108/QROM-07-2025-3101).
- Liu, H. (2019), “An embarrassment of riches: the seduction of postfeminism in the academy”, *Organization*, Vol. 26 No. 1, pp. 20-37, doi: [10.1177/1350508418763980](https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508418763980).
- Liu, H. (2022), “How we learn whiteness: disciplining and resisting management knowledge”, *Management Learning*, Vol. 53 No. 5, pp. 776-796, doi: [10.1177/13505076211061622](https://doi.org/10.1177/13505076211061622).
- Plourde, M. (2026), “Exploring environmental caring through affective and embodied writing”, *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, Vol. 21 No. 3, pp. 467-485, doi: [10.1108/QROM-05-2025-3012](https://doi.org/10.1108/QROM-05-2025-3012).
- Plunkett, M.E. (2026), “Cold war tensions, eating without dignity and food Nazis-a metaphor analysis of organizational control around eating”, *Qualitative Research in Organizations and*

- Pyatovskaya, E. (2026), "Flourishing against the odds: positive deviance case selection and formative influences timeline as methodological tools for tracing resilience in nonprofit organizations", *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, Vol. 21 No. 3, pp. 538-559, doi: [10.1108/QROM-07-2025-3116](https://doi.org/10.1108/QROM-07-2025-3116).
- Sahlin, K. (2024), "Barbara Czarniawska (1948-2024)", *Organization Studies*, Vol. 45 No. 8, pp. 1221-1223, doi: [10.1177/01708406241266326](https://doi.org/10.1177/01708406241266326).
- Scarduzio, J.A., Malvini Redden, S. and Way, A.K. (2026), "Visceral imprints on our minds, bodies and spirits: revealing and embracing viscosity in fieldwork", *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, Vol. 21 No. 3, pp. 432-448, doi: [10.1108/QROM-07-2025-3093](https://doi.org/10.1108/QROM-07-2025-3093).
- Stratton, C.M. (2026), "Trying alterity, passion and reflexivity: performing scholarly resistance to doing and writing qualitative inquiry", *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, Vol. 21 No. 3, pp. 397-413, doi: [10.1108/QROM-05-2025-3024](https://doi.org/10.1108/QROM-05-2025-3024).
- Villanueva, C.E., Spellman, C., Perez-Encinas, A. and Angeles, A. (2026), "Behind familiar doors: a scholar's reflexive journey into insider research", *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, Vol. 21 No. 3, pp. 414-431, doi: [10.1108/QROM-06-2025-3075](https://doi.org/10.1108/QROM-06-2025-3075).