

**Using verbatim quotations in reporting qualitative  
social research: A review of selected publications**

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## Introduction

This paper presents findings from one component of an ESRC funded research study of the theory, practice and impact of using verbatim quotations from research participants in reporting qualitative social research for policy. The study was conducted by the authors during 2003-05. This is the fifth in a series of six papers, each of which presents findings from one of the various components of the overall study. The first four papers are available (Corden and Sainsbury, 2005b; 2005c; 2006a; 2006b) and the final paper is forthcoming.

The paper begins by explaining the background to the overall study (1.1, replicated in all the papers in the series), and the approach taken in this desk based review (1.2).

### 1. Background and research methods

Including verbatim quotations from research participants has become effectively standard practice in much qualitative social research, and some research funders now expect final reports to include direct quotations. Support for this approach is being strengthened in the development of formal methods for critical appraisal and evaluation of policy-related qualitative studies, with the aim of grounding policy and practice in best evidence. Evaluative tools and frameworks which have emerged in the last decade for use in quality assessment of reports of qualitative research have been reviewed by Spencer *et al.* (2003). They looked at both empirically and philosophically based frameworks, emerging from within a range of disciplines. One important quality criterion for which there was broad consensus was how evidence and conclusions are derived, and verbatim quotations were identified as having a key role here. Authors of some of the frameworks developed within the health and social welfare sector spell out how inclusion of excerpts from transcripts help to clarify links between data, interpretation and conclusions, discussed variously within concepts such as validity, reliability, credibility and auditability (see, for example, Beck, 1993; Greenhalgh and Taylor, 1997; Spencer *et al.*, 2003; Long and Godfrey, 2004).

Such evaluative tools and frameworks are fairly recent additions to the research literature. When we planned our overall exploratory study of the use of verbatim quotations we found that a conceptual and theoretical basis for inclusion of verbatim quotations within social researchers' written texts was not well developed.

Explanations of the process of selection of quotations were rare, either within methodological texts or the research reports themselves. There were few examples of investigation of the impact on readers of verbatim quotations, and little was known about how research participants felt about the way their spoken words were used.

We set out to re-examine the approach to using verbatim quotations, with ESRC funding for exploratory study.

## **1.1 The overall study**

The aims of the overall study were to investigate the inclusion of respondents' verbatim quotations within written reports of applied research findings, from the perspectives of researchers, research users and people taking part in the research.

Specific objectives were:

- to review conceptual and theoretical arguments for using verbatim quotations in presenting findings
- to explore current practice and beliefs among social researchers
- to explore expectations and preferences of users of research
- to investigate views of those who speak the words presented
- to test, among a range of readers, accessibility, acceptability and impact of different ways of including verbatim quotations in research accounts
- to contribute to knowledge and understanding of qualitative methodology, especially in relation to analysis and presentation of findings
- to inform practice and teaching of qualitative social research
- to inform policy makers and other users of qualitative social research.

The study had a four stage design:

1. Review of the conceptual and theoretical bases for including direct quotations in presentation of findings.
2. Desk-based analysis of selected recent social research texts, to explore styles of reporting.
3. In-depth interviews with researchers and research users.
4. Empirical work to test the impact of quotations in a report of an evaluative study of people who took part in that study and people who read the same report.

Findings are available from the depth interviews with researchers (Corden and Sainsbury, 2006a) and research users (Corden and Sainsbury, 2006b). Findings from the empirical work to test the impact of quotations have been fully reported (Corden and Sainsbury, 2005a; 2005b and 2005c). This paper presents findings from the second component described above, the desk-based analysis of selected recent research texts, to explore styles of reporting verbatim words. We go on to describe the approach adopted.

## 1.2 The research approach

### 1.2.1 *Selection of texts for review*

The aim in this component of the study was to examine selected, well-read research texts to explore styles of using verbatim quotations and identify typologies of use. Such exploration would, we hoped, enable us to understand further whether and how quotations were being used in different ways. We had found thus far, in the general methods literature, rather little discussion about how quotations might be used, selected and presented. The hope was that a review of research texts might show patterns in inclusion and presentation of quotations that would help to explain what researchers were doing and what they hoped to achieve. In addition, we hoped to gain insight into the way writing practices develop. New researchers and students are influenced in learning how to write up their own research findings by those reports and articles they read. By looking at well-read texts we hoped to see the main styles of use of quotations that were likely to be influencing the next generation of researchers and the shape of future written output.

From the desk-based review, we hoped additionally to select a small group of authors who represented different styles of use of quotations, and invite them to take part in depth discussion about their approach. This formed the third component of the overall study, described above, and has been completed and reported (Corden and Sainsbury, 2006a).

For purposes of this review, we wished to look at a number of texts reporting qualitative research across different areas of social policy including social care, family policy, social work, health, education, employment, income maintenance, housing and homelessness, and criminal justice. We also chose to include nursing and midwifery, a rich source of research using verbatim quotations. We decided to focus on texts published since 1990, for reasons of consistency and in order to look at relatively recent research and writing. We wanted to look at texts likely to have been influential in policy making and practice, as well as being well-read in academic and research arenas. In order to do this we identified, in each policy area described, people who were currently or previously senior academics in their particular disciplines in British universities, who also had current or previous experience as senior practitioners or policy makers in those professions or policy streams in which they were or had been engaged academically. Such people were likely to have detailed and up to date knowledge of the academic discourse and recent research in their own areas, and recent developments and focus of interest in policy and practice in those areas. We identified eight such people through our own academic and policy networks.

We wrote to each, explaining that we were approaching them as a person with a general overview of research in their area. We asked, specifically, that they spent some time thinking across significant research in their particular area, published

since 1990, which reported findings from qualitative interviews or group discussions, either as the only method of enquiry, or one of the methods used. Such publications, we suggested, were likely to be books, chapters, reports or articles in journals. We explained that by 'significant' research we meant research that they personally believed made an important contribution to knowledge, policy or practice, either at the time or subsequently, and which is cited (or expected to be cited) in relevant literature. We asked each to suggest around ten such publications by different authors or groups of authors.

We asked that they tried to include in their list of suggestions some research funded by government and some by non-governmental organisations and, if possible, some publications by authors not working primarily within an academic setting. We recognised that some of the publications on such a list were likely to be their own or those of close colleagues, but asked that only one such item was selected. We asked people not to take anything else into account in making their selection, and particularly asked them not to take into account their own views about whether or how verbatim quotations from research participants had appeared.

We asked people to approach this as a quick and easy task, not trying to identify the 'most significant' publications, but rather ten items which they thought had had impact, with no implication that publications omitted from their list had any less impact or were less important than those included.

All those asked for help in this way responded, or recommended another person they thought more appropriate and who helped us. We received from them lists of up to ten publications covering research across social policy, social security, poverty and living standards, income maintenance, administration of benefits, employment, disability, ageing, education, criminal justice, nursing and midwifery, primary health care, family policy, marriage and divorce, social work, social care, housing and homelessness. There was some duplication of titles across the lists and some people suggested fewer than ten items. Some included in their list publications which did not draw on findings from qualitative interviews or group discussions and thus were not suitable for inclusion. One publication could not be obtained in the time available, and we decided not to include one of our own publications, because it would be hard to apply the same objectivity. Overall, there were 56 appropriate publications available for inclusion in this review, listed in Appendix A.

For clarity in what follows in this paper, we use the following terminology. We use 'the author(s)' when referring to those who wrote the publications reviewed. In most cases, such people were also 'researchers' in the sense that the findings they were reporting came from their own research, and we use this term interchangeably with 'author'. In some parts of the text we also use 'interviewer', to describe the person who conducted the qualitative interviews or steered the discussions reported in the publications. Where we provide examples of an author's practice, these come

directly from the material we reviewed, but we do not refer to any specific publications or authors. Italicised words and phrases (other than the italicised sub-headings) are extracted directly from publications studied.

### **1.2.2 Examination of texts**

One of us examined copies of all the texts. Using Microsoft Access computer software, details of each publication were noted as follows:

*Item:* Book/chapter/report/article or other.

*Target:* The proposed readership, as stated by authors or publishers, or found in editorial introductions or on back covers of books. Where there was no statement or indication of this kind in the publication itself, we made assumptions based on the areas of interest of the person who had proposed the publication, and the library classification.

*Reference:* Authors, date of publication, title, publisher

*Aim of qualitative research reported, and funder:* As stated in the publication and usually found in introductions.

*Research approach and methods:* Our brief summary of the main research methods and how the data were collected. This information was usually found in introductions or methods appendices. Where the information was missing, a note was made to this effect. We also sought the author's explanation of the research tradition or discipline within which they worked, and the 'schools' of knowledge underpinning their study. This information was not always given in the publication.

*Use of quotations:* The author's own explanation of their purpose in including verbatim words of people who had taken part in their research, and whether they had discussed this with the people concerned. We looked first for any general explanation in the introductory text. There was often no such introductory explanation, and we then went further into the text looking for any explanation or indication of purpose, or basis for selection, or any indication that those whose spoken words had been used had been consulted about this.

*Aspects of presentation:* Balance between author's text and verbatim words; technical aspects of format such as indentation, type face, and font; transcription conventions. Again, we sought first any explanation or discussion of these matters by the authors, and then went into the text for what was apparent to us.

*Speakers' identity:* Any explanation by authors about the descriptors used for attribution of spoken words (including aspects of ethnic and cultural representation).



Where there was no discussion of such matters by the author, we made notes based on observation.

*Our subjective views:* From our overview of the above details and the general impact of the publication, we made notes about our personal response to the way in which verbatim quotations had been used. Such observations were entirely subjective, representing just what one of us chose to record about general reactions and thoughts after looking at each publication. We have not drawn on these observations in the analysis which follows. Rather, the process of recording our reactions has helped our personal understanding about the way we read and assess research findings, and helped us clarify our thoughts about our own practice in using verbatim words.

For ease of viewing and interrogation, the Access data-base was also transferred to Microsoft Excel sheets. This visual data display was used as the basis for analysis.

The review continues as follows.

Part 2 provides general descriptive information about the texts studied, including the type of publication, how the reported research was funded, the research tradition and discipline of the author, the function and purpose of the publication, and methods of data collection in qualitative interviews and discussions. Part 3 begins our exploration of how authors used verbatim words from research participants, where we looked for authors' purpose in presenting verbatim words and how they selected quotations. Part 4 is concerned with aspects of presentation, such as the mix on the page between author's text, verbatim words and other material; publishing conventions such as type face and quotation marks, and authors' editing of excerpts from transcripts. Part 5 is concerned with aspects of identity and representation of the speakers, and whether authors discussed with research participants whether and how their spoken words might be used. A final part summarises findings from this review, and discusses issues arising.

## **2. The texts included in the review**

### **2.1 Type of publications**

Most of the 56 publications reviewed were books (22) or research reports (18). There were 11 articles from refereed journals, and five chapters in edited volumes.

There was a mix of single- and multi-authored publications. Altogether, the work of 93 different authors was represented, of whom eight were authors of two items included in the review, and one an author of four of the publications. Authors

represented more than once had contributed to multi-authored publications. One government publication did not have named authors.

### *Books*

We asked people proposing titles for inclusion in the review to think back across publications only as far as 1990. Thus, as expected, the books included were mostly published during the 1990s, with seven more recent publications. Two people argued for the inclusion of earlier texts, as particularly influential in their own field or 'founding texts'. We have included these, one first published during the 1970s and one during the 1980s. All the books were published in UK except three well known texts published in the US.

The general subject matter covered in the books included social care, social work, education, disability, sexuality, identity, family relationships, friendship, transitions to adulthood, household budgeting, homelessness, governance and criminal behaviour.

### *Chapters in books*

The chapters reviewed appeared in edited volumes published in UK between 1992 and 2001. The chapters were concerned with subjects including unemployment, social care, nursing care and primary health care.

### *Research reports*

All the research reports were UK publications and all except one have been published since 1995. One earlier report from 1985 was proposed, on the basis that some of the earliest examples of reporting applied social research in particular fields have been influential in providing the models for writing and reporting, and this report is included in the review. Several of the reports were concerned with different aspects of family policy, and other issues addressed included welfare services, care for elderly people, nursing, housing policy, poverty, and social and financial exclusion.

### *Articles*

The 11 articles appeared in seven different refereed journals published in UK or by international publishers between 1993 and 2004. The subject matter included social and community care, housing location and finance, nursing practice, social work practice, domestic and racist violence, school experience, and research methodology.

In summary, there was a mix of types and lengths of publications, concerned with a wide range of areas of social policy and practice. All the publications were readily accessible to UK readers. The intended readership, as stated in introductions or on back covers, included researchers, practitioners and students, policy makers, policy analysts, social scientists, service providers, voluntary and campaigning organisations. Many of the publications are well known texts in their particular disciplines and areas of research and practice.

## 2.2 The funders

We know from other components of this overall study (Corden and Sainsbury, 2006a) that some authors are influenced by research funders in their use of verbatim quotations, for example, the amount of verbatim material included, the forms of attribution used, or avoidance of spoken words which might seem offensive.

Overall, a wide range of funding bodies was involved in supporting the research reported in the 56 publications studied. Included were the Economic and Social Research Council, and similar councils abroad; voluntary sector organisations; trusts and foundations, including the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Nuffield; government departments (Health, Work and Pensions, Education and their predecessors; Home Office; Scottish Office; Probation Service); local health authorities; nursing and mid-wifery boards; and scholarships and small grants from universities. In 11 of the publications we were unable to find information about how the research was funded, and these included two publications which presented some findings from qualitative research conducted abroad.

## 2.3 The authors' research traditions

One aim of our examination of texts was to explore whether the author's use of verbatim quotations was related to the traditions of qualitative research in which they located their work or the philosophical origins of their particular approach. We looked for any explanation of or discussion about this in each publication.

Not all the authors of books included this kind of explanation. Some authors explained that their research fell within traditions of *ethnography*, *phenomenology* or *grounded theory*. One author said their research came within a *constructivist tradition*, and one described their work as within the tradition of *symbolic interactionism*. Less space is available in book chapters, and this may be one factor in our finding explicit reference by authors to their tradition or philosophical background in only one of the five chapters in edited volumes, which described the research approach as informed by *critical theory*.

Turning to the research reports, several had introductions in which authors explained their approach to research as one emphasising the perspective and experiences of service users. Two studies were located firmly within the tradition of *participatory and emancipatory research*, and one other was explained as an example of *realistic evaluation*, which included seeking accounts and experiences of all those involved. Many of the research reports contained no introductory discussions of this kind, however, beyond the author's explanation of their aim 'to examine', 'to investigate', 'to assess' or 'to explore'.

When the articles were examined, three of the studies reported were described as *ethnographically informed* and two drew on *narrative analysis*. One qualitative study was based on a *constructivist approach*. Authors of other articles did not explicitly describe their underlying approach.

In the above account we have not attempted an overall categorisation of the publications according to the different traditions within which authors located their work, or their philosophical approaches. Such constructs are interpreted in different ways. While some authors provided a full discussion of their approach, or gave various references and citations to help readers understand more about their tradition and stance, many offered no explanation of this kind themselves. Attempting an overall categorisation would have required making assumptions inappropriate to this text-based analysis. The focus of our interest was whether the authors' use of verbatim quotations was related to the underlying approach they described, and we discuss later what we found.

Readers who want to know more about ontological and epistemological positions relating to different kinds of understanding and scientific method in qualitative social research might refer to the discussion by Snape and Spencer (2003) of the foundations of qualitative research.

## **2.4 The functions of the investigations reported**

As expected, the publications covered a range of different kinds of investigations, which had been conducted to provide information and increase understanding in different ways. We were interested in looking for any links between what the investigation was for, and how verbatim quotations were used.

Using Ritchie's (2003) broad classification of the functions of social investigation, we found examples in the publications studied across the spectrum of contextual; explanatory; evaluative and generative enquiries.

- Contextual research describes and explores what exists, as experienced and interpreted by participants in the phenomenon. There were many examples of such investigations among the publications studied, such as studies of what it means to be a family carer, and what are people's perceptions of 'home'.
- Explanatory research examines reasons for what exists, and the influences leading to their occurrence. Examples among the texts we looked at were studies about why people become homeless, and how people with criminal records manage not to re-offend.

- Evaluative research appraises the effectiveness of what exists, and the contexts, processes and outcomes of interventions. The group of publications we studied included reports of research to assess different ways of providing financial support for housing, and evaluations of initiatives designed to enable groups of service users to communicate their needs and experiences.
- Generative enquiries aid development of theory, strategy or action. Examples we saw included investigations to contribute to the theorisation of racist violence, and to identify practical ways of tackling financial exclusion.

When we looked at the functions of the various publications, it was important to remember that the role and purpose of the publication was sometimes different from the aim of the empirical qualitative research studies on which the publication drew. This happened, for example, in some articles in which authors aimed to demonstrate methodological process and analytical technique, drawing on empirical data from separate studies, or when investigations were based on secondary analysis of transcripts from other studies.

## **2.5 Data collection**

All the publications studied drew on data collected in interviews or group discussions. The interviews described included both face to face interviews and telephone interviews. In some cases, interviews and/or group discussions were the only research method used; in other studies they were used along with other kinds of enquiry such as literature review, participant observation and ethnographic placements; audits of and site visits to service provision; workshops; video recording; diaries (kept both by authors and research participants); role-playing sessions; documentary analysis; drawing techniques with children; 'citizens' juries' or 'committees', and structured questionnaires. Two publications were based on review and re-analysis of primary data conducted in earlier studies.

The methods used to record what people say in interviews and discussions, and the analytical techniques used both influence the kind of data available for presentation as verbatim material. There was wide variation in the way such methods were described. Some authors explained in depth how the research interviews and discussions were conducted; whether tape recordings were transcribed; how data were extracted and organised; and how the analysis proceeded. Not all interviews and discussions were tape recorded. Some authors described making hand written notes during interviews, with expansion and clarification from memory later in their office. Those who had conducted ethnographic fieldwork or been participant observers wrote up their notes after the interactions; and sometimes wrote down spoken words and phrases that they remembered.

By contrast with publications which provided full information about research methods, some authors offered no technical detail. In such cases, some authors referred readers to a separate publication for technical details. However, there were several publications in which the reader was given no information about research methods and analysis other than being told, for example, that 60 semi-structured interviews were conducted. There were no clear patterns linking the amount of page-space available to the author and the amount of technical detail about research methods. Thus some books (in which we might expect less constraint on space) included no such explanations, while some journal articles included full details about data collection and analysis.

### **3. Purpose and selection in using verbatim words**

All the publications reviewed included the presentation of some verbatim words from people who had taken part in the research reported.

In terms of the balance between the amount of quoted material and the authors' narrative text the studies based on narrative or conversation analysis, or interaction analysis, formed a particular group here. The analytical approach meant that passages of spoken words and dialogue were themselves the matter for enquiry and interpretation. Typically, a long excerpt from a transcript (sometimes several pages in a publication) was presented to the reader and the author went on to unpick the meanings behind the words within the theme of the research. Another approach was that in which very short excerpts from transcripts were presented, followed by intensive interpretation by the author.

Apart from this particular group of publications, there was otherwise wide variation in the balance between the amount of quoted material and the author's narrative text. In some books, quotations were used sparingly and somewhat unevenly within the overall text. On the other hand, there were publications of all types in which it was common to find, within the sections reporting findings, more than one third of the space on most pages given up to verbatim material, and some pages which included six or more separate indented blocks of speech. The greatest use of verbatim material was seen in publications or sections of publications reporting views and experiences of service users (health, social care, housing services) and studies of personal relationships. In one such publication, reporting research conducted within a participatory paradigm, more space was given to verbatim material than to the authors' linking text.

A focus of our interest was the purpose behind the presentation of the verbatim material and the way in which it had been selected, which were likely to be linked. We wanted to know if readers would find such explanations in introductory chapters or paragraphs of the publications, so that they had some understanding of the

significance of the quotations they would meet in what followed. If there were no such preliminary explanations, we wanted to know whether readers would find such explanations as they read further into the text, and came across the quotations. It seemed possible that the latter approach might be adopted by authors who used quotations in many different ways, such that the reason for inclusion of each transcript extract would need separate explanation. Thus we looked first for authors' preliminary overall explanation, then for explanations further into the text, attached to particular sections or particular quotations. Where we found no explanation, we looked for any indications or clues within the texts that might serve to help the reader understand how quotations were being used.

Authors presenting a narrative analysis generally explained in some detail, either in introductions or appendices, why they had chosen passages presented and how their analysis contributed to understanding. They usually referred to the linguistic or sociological theories on which they drew. Among the publications which did not draw on narrative analysis, authors who offered readers more detailed and reflective discussion about the inclusion of spoken words, before these began to appear in the text, generally came from an ethnographic tradition. In a journal article describing a study of household decision making, the author discussed at length the tension perceived between summarising findings from an ethnographic study with various components, and at the same time using a small number of selected quotations from interviews to illustrate the author's claims. Readers were told that, taking account of the constraints of the journal space, quotations included in the article were chosen to show how decisions were made, and also to demonstrate the relevance of the author's research approach. Another ethnographic study, reported in a book, included an early section on the role of the authors as an integral part of the interpretation offered. Here, the authors explained their decision to include their own diary extracts within the text so that '*our individual voices*' could be heard, where appropriate. They described a sense of motivation, during their fieldwork, to get stories from people that would help to make their research outputs effective, and feelings of excitement when they tape recorded interviews which would yield a '*crop of good quotes*'.

Otherwise, we found general introductory explanation or discussion to guide readers about the purpose of the verbatim quotations in what they were about to read in only a few publications – two different reports about the experience of parenthood; a report about benefit administration, and a chapter about professional practice. There were further brief references, in four other book introductions, to use of quotations as illustrative material.

Although many authors were not explicit about the way they would be using verbatim words in what readers were about to see, there were sometimes fairly easy assumptions for readers to make from other parts of the general introductions. For example, when authors described aims of their publications in terms of accessing the

voices of people or enabling them to be heard, readers might assume this was also the purpose of presenting verbatim words.

Although (among publications not based on narrative analysis or ethnography) we found rather little in the way of introductory explanation about authors' overall purpose in including verbatim words, as we read further into the texts some explanations emerged. As an example, when one author wrote that 'the following quotation showed feelings that were typical' we understood that the verbatim words immediately following were those of one person who expressed feelings which were generally shared by others. This kind of direct explanation from authors was thin on the ground however. More often, in texts which interwove authors' narrative and verbatim words, readers had to work out themselves how to consider the verbatim material, using the clues and indications available. As an example, one section in a report began with four short indented quotations, none of which was individually attributed. Following this series of quotations, the author's narrative in this section began by explaining that many people were dissatisfied with the information they had been given. The author did not tell the reader directly that the preceding quotations illustrated different ways in which people had been dissatisfied, but this seemed a reasonable interpretation. What remained unclear was whether the author's decision to present four separate quotations was also intended as some kind of quantitative indication of the 'many' people referred to.

Putting together the direct evidence from authors and our own interpretations, it appeared that authors of the publications studied had selected verbatim material for presentation on the following bases:

- **as the basis for their study**

Authors of texts based on narrative analysis generally explained to readers in introductory sections how the passages of spoken words presented formed the matter for their enquiry. They explained how an important (or only) part of their analysis was interpretation of the nature and structure of talk, and went on to present their interpretation of the speech codes and structures of the research participants, the linguistic devices used to explain behaviour, the 'verbal cues' to underlying beliefs and feelings, and how people construct their accounts. Authors of a study using interaction analysis explained that they would use excerpts of transcripts to show what happened in conversations between professionals and service users, for example in terms of power relationships.

In an ethnographic study, authors explained that blocks of dialogue were specifically chosen for analysis of power relationships and identifications. Other authors writing within ethnographic traditions explained that blocks of dialogue were chosen to show the interactions on which their interpretations were built, or to enable them to show readers their analysis of political discourse. In all such texts, there were lengthy passages of dialogue, often of more than one page.



- **as evidence**

Only one author talked directly about the role of verbatim material as evidence. This author's research methods had developed as the study proceeded, blending grounded theory and narrative analysis. The book was concerned with the way in which people make sense of their lives, and in an appendix the author explained that transcript extracts were available as evidence for the generalisations made, and so that readers might consider other interpretations. Another author, writing in a journal article about the way people construct their experiences and feelings, said that transcript data enabled readers to judge the validity of the analysis against what had been said.

There were many examples of authors who made a point and then followed this with a quotation or, *vice versa*, presented a quotation and then went on to argue a point. Included here were studies claiming to be based on grounded theory. In some cases, it seemed that such authors perhaps believed that the verbatim material provided some evidence for the point they made, or justified their interpretations. For example, when authors introduced a quotation with the phrase 'It was evident from their words that ...' this suggested that they ascribed evidential status to the quotation presented. Similarly, when authors followed a quotation by saying 'This account showed that ...' again, this suggested that they perceived the quotation as providing evidence.

How far verbatim words should be considered to be evidence is a matter for debate. White *et al.* (2003) argue that although it is a common view that verbatim words constitute evidence for findings, they can usually only provide partial evidence, and more often serve to illustrate or amplify the author's point.<sup>1</sup> We go on to discuss several ways in which quotations were used for illustrative purposes.

- **as illustration of an author's point**

In this review of texts, some of the quotations we read did appear to serve mainly as an example of or to illustrate a point made by the author or a line of argument, rather than to provide evidence. At the beginning of a chapter about professional practice, the author explained that data were presented for purposes of illustration of the need for and extent of change. Within the books, where there are often fewer constraints on length of text in comparison with journal articles or chapters, we found many examples of quotations which were reiterations of the author's point, sometimes introduced by the author by phrases such as 'As an example, one woman said ...' or 'In one woman's words ...'.

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<sup>1</sup> In an earlier component of this research programme (Corden and Sainsbury, 2006a) we asked a group of researchers about their purpose in using quotations in reporting findings. Some said they used quotations to help provide evidence for their interpretations, and compared this use of data with the way tables of statistical data might appear in reports based on quantitative findings. A contrary view was argued strongly, however, among researchers who emphasised that quotations, as such, were not evidence.

- **to illustrate how people understand and experience the world and create meaning**

There appeared to us to be many examples of verbatim words presented in order to help readers understand how people made sense of their world, and why they believed or behaved as they did. The introductory chapter to a research report drawing on interviews with young adults said that evidence would be explored by using people's voices to explain current circumstances, to bring to light some of their perceptions of parenthood and constraints experienced. Across the various texts we found verbatim words interwoven with authors' narrative which appeared to be presented to increase understanding of, for example, how people marginalise others; how people conceptualise aspects of their work; how people manage emotional tasks; how people construct personal relationships; how they attach significance; how they have erroneous beliefs; how they conceptualise policy measures; how they link issues and beliefs; how people construct their treatment by others, and how children fit language to concepts and explain their behaviour.

Some authors who wanted to illustrate the complexity of people's understanding of a phenomenon presented a paragraph length excerpt from a transcript in which the person interviewed brought together beliefs, events, chronology, perceptions and feelings. As an example, an author describing how a manager purchased services illustrated the complexity of what the manager described as looking for value for money rather than a cheap deal. The seven line transcript excerpt showed how a number of different beliefs and experiences were taken into account in assessment of the best deal.

- **to illustrate how people express their views and explain their feelings**

In one report, the authors stated in their general introduction that quotations would be used for illustration of the way people think, talk and behave, and emphasised that the material must be read in context of the surrounding text.

Many other authors claimed, within their text, to be using quotations to illustrate views and feelings such as frustration, scepticism, disappointment, bitterness, complacency, distress, resignation, racism or anger. It was often not clear, however, whether the person interviewed had identified such feelings themselves, or whether the author was interpreting their feelings for the reader. For example, when an author wrote that a person 'expressed her disappointment in the following words', we did not know whether the person concerned said she was disappointed, or whether it was the author who was interpreting disappointment in the phrases used. Some authors claimed that the verbatim words presented demonstrated strength or depth of feeling.

- **to demonstrate difference or similarity in views and experiences**

Setting two sets of verbatim words alongside was one way for some authors to demonstrate opposing views, or similarities in views, on the same topic among

different people. In some publications, this was a way to enable readers to compare views of spouses, or different household members; or to gain insight into different experiences of the same interaction, for example interaction between patient and nurse; or between the person providing care and the care recipient.

- **to demonstrate the type of language people used when talking about topics**

Authors presenting quotations from professionals and service providers who had taken part in their research appeared often to use this technique to demonstrate the professional discourse of regulation or service provision. Presenting verbatim words spoken by medical personnel, supervisors and administrators alongside the verbatim words from service users describing the same or similar interactions was one way of demonstrating how different use of language may influence processes of communication and understanding.

Other forms of particular 'sub-sets' of language presented for readers included those from various criminal behaviours, and worlds of drug abuse, violence and prostitution. Here were some words and phrases whose meaning and significance readers might not understand without contextual explanations.

- **to enable people to make their own points**

The stated aim of one study conducted within a participatory paradigm was to enable people to make their own points and put forward their own views. An author of an experimental form of writing up explained that the book enabled voices to provide their own narration.

Other authors made more indirect reference to a similar commitment, for example saying in their introductions that it was important for people to be able to explain experiences themselves. Such authors rarely explained how they had selected those people who were to be enabled to have their words represented. In some publications, word-length constraints mean that authors could include only a small fraction of the verbatim material collected.

In a minority of publications it was possible for us to work out how many respondents did have their own words represented. For example, when quotations were attributed to named or numbered respondents, it was possible to count how many times one person's words were used, and how many people in the study group were not represented verbatim. We tried to do this wherever possible, and found wide variation. At one end of a spectrum were books drawing on interviews with 35 people or more, in which we worked out that all, or all except one or two, were represented verbatim at least once. By contrast were several books and reports in which we worked out that only a small proportion of the study group had their words represented. In such cases, those whose words were used were sometimes represented in seven or eight separate places. It was unusual for authors to explain such selection and this raised questions as to whether those whose words were used

frequently were the most articulate, or had the widest range of experiences, or whether they had taken part in longer interviews. We also wondered what had happened when we found quotations attributed to more named people than the number of participants in the research, as described in methods sections or appendices about recruitment.

- **to make text vivid and bring it to life**

There were explanations from some authors in their introductory chapters or later sections that quotations present things in more vivid ways than the author can achieve. A report about benefit administration explained in the preliminary pages that extensive use of verbatim quotations provided a vivid impression of the way people thought and spoke. The authors said the verbatim material should be read in the context of the surrounding text, was for illustrative purposes, and presence or absence of spoken words did not necessarily indicate the importance of a particular topic. The idea that quotations portray feelings in a 'vivid way' was shared by authors of a report about lone parents, who said that spoken words often achieved what analysis and interpretation could not necessarily do in this respect.

- **to demonstrate quantitative perspectives**

It was apparent that some authors were selecting and presenting quotations to demonstrate quantitative perspectives of their findings. Several authors illustrated 'a majority view' or 'a constant theme' with a series of separate quotations making the same point. The aim was apparently to make an impact on readers by the repetition or amount of space taken up. A similar technique was adopted by authors who explained that several people shared the same feeling or experience, and followed by presenting two or more similar quotations from different people. There were several examples of authors reporting findings from group discussions who said similar views were held by people in all groups and then presented a quotation from each group, as a numerical reflection of their claim.

- **to provide exemplars from individual cases alongside statistical findings**

Another particular way in which quotations were used to bring together quantitative and qualitative perspectives was seen in studies which mixed quantitative and qualitative approaches. Here, some authors used a technique of presenting an excerpt from an interview alongside a table or figure presenting quantitative findings. The quotations appeared to be used to illustrate what was happening to individual people that was contributing to the general statistical finding. One author who did this, for example, showed quantitatively how people used resources and then presented excerpts from interviews as examples of the ways resources were used.

In summary, across the publications reviewed, there was rather little in the way of general introductory explanations for readers about the author's purpose in presenting verbatim words (apart from a group of publications drawing on narrative analysis or ethnography). As readers went further into the text, and findings were

presented, they were likely to meet some explanations and indications for the variety of ways in which quotations were being used. Some authors used quotations in various different ways within the same text; others took a more specific approach, for example generally using quotations to provide illustrative material for their arguments. It was not always possible for us to work out the purpose underlying some of the quotations we read, especially when extracts from transcripts appeared immediately below chapter titles, and did not appear to fit the context of the narrative immediately following.

## **4. Aspects of presentation**

When people read, their concentration, understanding, memory and enjoyment are all affected by visual impact of aspects of presentation on the page. Publishers have their own conventions about page margins, type face and line spacing, and publishing houses usually issue guidelines to authors so that the copy submitted falls generally within the publishing conventions. Depending on which publisher is involved, authors may be able to make some decisions themselves about their presentation of material such as written extracts from other publications or representations of verbatim words.

We examined the 56 publications to see what practice was in relation to distinguishing the verbatim quotations and their placing on the page; whether any patterns could be identified, and whether authors discussed these issues, or explained decisions made.

### **4.1 Distinguishing spoken words**

When authors display different kinds of data along with their own narrative the distinctions must be made clear to the reader. The 56 publications showed a range of techniques by which authors indicated the difference between their own commentary and interpretation and the verbatim words of research participants. Depending on the data sources used, some authors needed to make further distinctions. For example, a broadly based book about a particular social problem and the policy responses included, along with the authors' narrative text, extracts from depth interviews they had conducted; extracts from interviews conducted in other studies; qualitative material from field notes and diaries of the researchers; extracts from other authors' publications and policy documents; and parts of politicians' speeches.

Some authors also drew attention to distinctions in meaning attached to particular words or phrases within their own narrative. For example, some authors chose to convey emphasis in their own narrative by change in type face or italicisation. Some

authors made frequent use of the linguistic technique of 'evidentiality'. This is a technique for communicating the author's attitude to or distance from the source of information, usually through quotation marks.<sup>2</sup>

The focus of our interest was how, within the 56 publications studied, authors and publishers indicated to readers that text represented spoken words of people who had taken part in the research.

Publications drawing on narrative analysis formed a particular group here, because the excerpts from discussions had been prepared using specialist narrative transcription conventions. This kind of specialist textual representation of speech, for example presenting words and phrases in numbered lines and short units, with a variety of specialist transcription marks, was always clearly different from the way the authors' narrative was presented. Detailed explanations of the narrative transcription conventions were usually provided in the book appendices or introductory chapters.

We turn now to the majority of the publications, which did not include such specialist narrative transcription. Here, the technique of indentation of blocks of spoken words was widely used, displaying verbatim words within wider margins than the author's narrative, usually indented from the left hand side but sometimes from both sides. Other common techniques were presentation of quotations in a smaller type face than that used for the narrative or in italicised script. Changes in line spacing between narrative and blocks of quotations, or smaller line spacing within the blocks of quotations were also often used as signposts to the reader. In some publications, blocks of verbatim words were enclosed within single or double quotation marks.

Apart from displaying verbatim words in blocks, separated from the narrative text, some authors presented short quotations embedded within their own writing, either as a separate sentence between sentences written by the author, or in words or short phrases inserted into the author's own sentence. Such embedded quotations were usually enclosed within quotation marks.

Various combinations of these different techniques were found, along with publications adopting just one approach. Apart from the publications which contained specialist narrative transcription, or experimental writing, we found only one in which there was explanation about the technique used to distinguish verbatim words from authors' commentary. Here, the author told readers that all the quotations in double inverted commas were direct quotations from participants. Otherwise, we do not know whether any of the techniques used reflected authors' choices or publishers' conventions. Some aspects of textual display raised interesting issues. For example, in some publications reporting service evaluations,

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<sup>2</sup> For example, an author might describe a person as 'actively seeking work' to demonstrate that this was an administratively imposed categorisation rather than the author's own description.

we found verbatim words from service users generally displayed in indented blocks of type, whereas views of service providers and managers were more often embedded within the author's narrative text. This raised questions about the impact this might have on readers. For example, it seemed possible that these different spatial and locational representations might suggest differences in status, 'separateness', or professionalism between the different groups of research participants and the author.

Five of the 56 publications, (books and reports from four different publishing houses), incorporated a considerable amount of colour on their pages. In these publications, some (but not all) verbatim words appeared in a coloured typeface or, more usually, within colour shaded boxes presenting case summaries. We found no textual explanation of such use of colour.

## **4.2 Editing**

Written text for publication in most policy-related books and journal articles is governed by general grammatical rules about sentence construction, spelling and punctuation. Spoken language may reflect some of these rules, some of the time. However, when speaking to another person, people use words in ways that fit the immediacy and context of individual situations, and the purpose of the communication. It is common for people not to speak in sentences which would be grammatically correct under rules for written language. It is common for people to create time to think by trying out what they might say and then changing course – what is sometimes called a 'false start'. People use a range of words or phrases to ease communication, for example 'you know' or 'like I said'. They use tone and cadence as signs of meaning in speaking, and give other kinds of signals at the same time such as shrugging, shaking their head or rolling their eyes.

In order to make some kind of representation of speech as written text for inclusion in an author's own publication a number of editing decisions must be taken at various stages. The person listening to and transcribing a tape recording of an interview or discussion must decide whether and how to add punctuation; what to do about spoken word forms such as 'dunno'; whether and how to represent what they hear as pauses, laughter or crying. The author selecting passages of transcript for presentation in writing may choose to edit further, for example taking out names of people or places, for purposes of confidentiality, or taking out 'false starts' they consider unnecessary for readers' understanding of the speaker's meaning. They may also add their own explanations within the transcript, to aid readers' understanding, for example explaining jargon or a locally used word. Some authors may have to decide whether to include words which might be offensive to some readers, such as swearing. Some authors may want to make decisions about how to use transcripts in which the speaker's use of language may indicate characteristics such as ethnicity or speech impairment.

We examined the 56 publications, looking first for any general explanation by the author about transcription conventions used, or editorial decisions of the kind described. As explained, publications which drew on narrative analysis formed a special group here. Here, authors discussed the way they were dealing with spoken language and sometimes appended full transcription conventions. Some authors writing within an ethnographic tradition also referred to some of the transcription conventions carried over into the publication, for example explaining how pauses of different lengths were represented, how it was shown that two people speak over each other, and how words were sometimes elongated to indicate apparent emotional significance. In one book based on ethnographic study the author said he had 'modified' some of the actual words to facilitate the complex dialogue within a case study, but without explaining what had been done.

Otherwise, we found very little in the way of general explanation of the transcription conventions used with the tape recorded material, or whether and how authors had edited excerpts from transcripts for inclusion in their publications. It is possible, of course, that we did not spot authors' explanations in some publications. We looked carefully in introductory chapters, indices, appendices, and chapter introductions, but we rarely found what we were seeking. What follows in this section is based on what we observed within these texts.

Inclusion of a series of dots was a frequent feature of the verbatim words presented, and examples were found of two, three and four dots being used, at the beginning, end or in the middle of verbatim material. These were apparently being used to indicate pauses, or parts of sentences omitted, or both. We were often unable to decide what a series of dots meant or what significance we should attach.

Square brackets were also used in apparently different ways. We observed that some authors put square brackets around words of their own which they had inserted to replace the speaker's, usually to replace a name with a more general descriptor, probably to maintain anonymity. Some authors inserted words in square brackets when otherwise meaning would not have been clear. Examples included inserting [parents] or [patients] when speakers referred to 'they'; adding [sweets] to explain a local use of 'spice' and adding [electricity] to explain 'leccy'. Some authors inserted their own commentary within square brackets. Examples included [talking in background] to indicate some of the group processes taking place in a group discussion; [said with a negative emphasis] or [laughs], [shrugs] or [trembling] to indicate non-verbal communications; and [inaudible] or [rest obliterated] to explain apparent missing information. Examples were found of round brackets being used in similar ways by other authors. We found several examples of apparently inconsistent use of round and square brackets within the same publication. In several publications, authors inserted square or round brackets around a series of dots, and we did not know what this meant.



Use of phonetic spellings such as 'dunno' was fairly frequent, and words such as 'cos', 'owt' and 'nowt', but some publications contained no such words. Similarly, throughout some publications we found no examples of 'um', 'er', 'you know' or 'I mean' or minor grammatical mistakes such as 'I were so tired', while in other publications reporting research with similar groups of people this was a general part of the speech presented. The impression we gained was that some authors were probably editing and correcting transcript material in various ways, while others were not or, at least, editing to a much lower extent.

## **5. The speakers' identity**

### **5.1 Attributions**

Depending on the aim of the research reported in these publications and the context, some authors wanted to make clear what kind of person spoke the words which they presented verbatim. They often wanted to give the reader more information about the speaker than just saying 'One person said ...' or 'A view from one group was ...', although the latter approaches were appropriate in some places.

We generally do not know how far people who took part in the research reported in these publications understood how they would be grouped and described. People had been invited to take part in the research as, for example, service users, older people, members of families, carers, residents, mortgagors, administrative staff, managers, nurses or teachers. These were some of the general roles and categories important to the authors' investigations. The authors' analysis and reporting often created various further categories, sub-groups and identities, including social class.

Such categories and identities were used as descriptors when attributing spoken words. This was sometimes done within the author's text, for example simple phrases such as 'Another manager said ...', 'A provider observed ...' or 'One young mother made this clear, saying ...'. Another technique was to include a short descriptor within brackets at the end of the quotation, for example: (lone mother with one child; long term claimant) or (male probation officer, area 3). Some authors attributed quotations to specific individuals by numbering people or using names, such as (nurse18) or (Robin, aged 19 years). In excerpts from transcripts of discussion groups, a common technique was to number participants and identify gender, thus for example M1, F3, M2. Authors who used more elaborate systems of attribution, for example various different series of code numbers for different characteristics, explained such approaches in introductions or appendices.

Authors who used people's names or titles, or names of locations such as (Maureen) or (care worker, Eastwick area) generally explained in introductions or appendices whether these were fictitious. Use of fictitious names was generally linked with

maintaining anonymity of participants. However, when attributions specific to individuals were used (names or numbers), and the same person's words were used in various different parts of the publication, it was sometimes possible for a reader who wanted to do so to trace one person's views and experiences across a number of areas. Authors of a publication reporting some participatory research explained that this was intentional, and authors of a report about family circumstances explained how readers could use the numbers used as attributions to quotations from individuals to bring together views of different members of specific households. By contrast, authors of a book about family relationships reported their awareness of the possibility of breaching people's confidentiality in this way, even when pseudonyms were used. They explained it was sometimes necessary to use quotations extracted from context or without any pseudonym attached. In another book reporting an ethnographic study of young people, the author explained that although some participants were happy for their real names to be used, the decision was made to use pseudonyms, for reasons of confidentiality, and some details of personal characteristics and circumstances had been '*shuffled*'.

Authors who explained that people chose their own pseudonym included some reporting research with children. When authors themselves had chosen fictitious names, they rarely explained how they had chosen such names. It seemed to us that some authors chose names likely to reflect age groups of participants. Apart from publications in which ethnic and racial issues were central (discussed in the following section) it was unusual to find pseudonyms which suggested minority ethnic backgrounds.

When verbatim words of interviewees were presented, these were usually attributed to 'researcher' or 'interviewer' or that person's name or initials. In a publication about the interpretation of the way people talk about their lives, the codes used in attributing spoken words also indicated which of three interviewees had conducted the interview. The author considered it important to take into account that development of discussions depended on both the individuals taking part.

Finally, we mention one publication in which the author reported that the question of attribution of verbatim words raised some particular issues. As a study of development of a specific piece of legislation, key actors who were interviewed, including policy makers, senior civil servants, heads of industry and well-known organisations, some still in post, would be easily identifiable. Much of the analysis depended on discussion of the roles of these key people, some of whom expected to be named. The author discusses in an appendix how some of the civil servants wanted to see any words spoken by themselves that were to be published, and how this affected decisions about how their words would be attributed. The author describes '*trading-off*' attribution by name against maintaining control of use of the data. In the event, verbatim words used in the book were attributed using people's

real names, apart from those of the civil servants, where the author uses techniques such as ‘A civil servant commented ...’.

## **5.2 Other aspects of identity**

One personal characteristic which may become apparent to readers by representation of spoken words is the ethnic background of the speaker. Certain speech patterns and sentence constructions may suggest to readers particular ethnic groups. Authors whose research has included interviews conducted in languages other than English must make decisions about whether and how to represent such speech. Decisions may also be required about whether and how to represent quotations from people with some kinds of communication impairments or health conditions which might make the representation of their reported spoken words look ‘different’ from those of other participants.

The few publications in which authors discussed ethnic and cultural identities apparent from the verbatim words presented were ethnographic studies where ethnic and racial issues were central. In these publications, people taking part were given ethnic pseudonyms, and sentence constructions and speech patterns likely to suggest minority ethnic backgrounds to majority group readers were not edited into standard English.

Otherwise, we found little discussion of such issues within the publications studied. Although many authors explained in their introductions that people who had taken part in their research included people from minority ethnic backgrounds, and some authors noted that respondents included people with communication problems, the verbatim words which appeared very rarely reflected forms of speech which might be expected from some such people. This raised questions in our minds as to whether speech which might appear ‘different’ had been edited into more standard English or whether selection of quotations had purposefully excluded verbatim words from people whose speech would appear ‘different’. Similarly, we wondered whether standard English names were sometimes used as pseudonyms for people with non-English names. In this group of 56 publications, there was rarely any information about authors’ decisions about representation of excerpts from interviews conducted in languages other than English.

Other ways in which ‘images’ and ‘identities’ of people may be created in readers’ minds include the impact of speech which includes swearing, and representations of regional language or dialect in the words.

A small number of publications in which the verbatim quotations were permeated by aggressive slang and sexual swearing were ethnographic studies, which included authors’ discussion about interpretation of voice, text and context, and the way in

which people were portrayed. Otherwise, we found no explanations from authors about decisions taken about inclusion of swearing. It was not uncommon to find occasional quotations including swear words used for emphasis, such as 'I told him I bloody well wouldn't do it' and commonly used phrases such as 'he bugged off' meaning 'he went away' and 'it was shit' to indicate a negative experience. We might expect different readers to be influenced in different ways here, depending on their own familiarity with and use of such language.

Regional dialects and forms of speech most commonly represented in the quotations, overall, came from people in the north of England and Scotland. Some authors who explained some of their fieldwork had been conducted in such areas presented verbatim quotations full of representations of dialect and regional phrases (mam; bairn; canny; weans; about). Other authors who had conducted fieldwork in similar locations used quotations which did not include such representations. We found no quotations with representations of dialects or speech which suggested to us other regions (for example Wales or the West Country).

### **5.3 Consulting with the speakers**

We looked for information as to whether authors had discussed with those who spoke the words how such words might be presented in publications. It was unusual to find any evidence that authors had talked to people who took part in their research about the way their spoken words might be represented in written outputs from the research. In one ethnographical study it emerged in the text that some young people who had taken part in interviews and discussions read transcripts, but their reactions were not described. In a second ethnographic study, the author describes in the appendix showing early drafts of the book to some young people who had taken part. Some found parts of the drafts hard to understand, but remembered some of the interactions and events described by the author. There was a feeling that it was good to have their views represented, although some participants acknowledged that they may have exaggerated a bit.

We found only one publication in which it was clear that some participants had looked at transcripts in order to approve verbatim material that the author intended to quote. This was a study described above in Section 5.1 in which people who took part in interviews were senior personnel from government and industry, some of whom asked themselves to see how their words were to be publicly presented.

One author reported trying to interest young people in potential published outcomes of the project they had taken part in, but meeting little interest. And joint authors of one report regretted failing in their intention to return interview transcripts to service users and go through rounds of discussion with them about presentation, as a result of resource constraints.

It is possible that other authors discussed with research participants the way spoken words might be used, for example in introductory discussions in interviews, or in gaining consent to take part. In general, however, our review showed that this was not a matter for reporting to readers.

## **6. Summary and discussion**

The 56 publications included in this study were chosen subjectively by a number of other people, all currently or previously senior academics, with experience as practitioners or policy makers in their field. They considered the publications to be well-read texts, which had made significant contribution to knowledge, policy or practice. Most of the texts had been published since 1990, and there was a mix of types and lengths of publications, concerned with a range of areas of social policy and practice. Overall, 93 authors were represented; a range of research funding bodies, and different publishing houses. All the publications included some representations of words spoken verbatim by research participants (and sometimes interviewers) during qualitative interviews or discussion groups.

The texts included are not representative, in statistical terms, of any kind of publication or research. However, they are judged by senior and experienced people to be well-known and influential. The intended readership included researchers, practitioners and students, policy makers, policy analysts, social scientists, service providers, voluntary and campaigning organisations. We believe there is much to learn from scrutiny of the way the authors of these publications have used verbatim quotations.

The first issue for discussion in this concluding part is whether we were able to identify any typologies in use of verbatim words, in terms of, for example, the purpose and basis for selection, the balance between the author's narrative and quotations, or technical aspects of presentation on the page. We found that studies based on narrative analysis, or interaction analysis, and studies conducted within an ethnographic tradition did form a special group here. Where the analytical approach meant that passages of spoken words and dialogue were themselves the matter for enquiry and interpretation, or formed one part of a wider ethnographic study, authors generally explained in some detail why they had chosen passages presented and how their analysis of these contributed to understanding. There was usually some discussion for readers about the sociological or linguistic theories on which the authors drew, and also some explanation about the transcribing conventions used in the way speech was represented as text. Texts based on participatory research, in which priority was given to participants' own words, also formed a special group.

Apart from these particular groups of publications, however, we could go no further in identification of typologies of use of quotations in applied social research. We could

report on variety in styles but found no general framework in which to present the wide range of differences. This was largely because so much of the information required for constructing such a framework was not available. In many of the publications, authors gave no explanation of the theoretical or philosophical approach within which their work was located, and some did not explain technical details of data collection or analysis. Many authors were not explicit about the way they selected verbatim material for inclusion or their purpose in presenting spoken words. There was a general lack of transparency about editing decisions made by the author. We did not see styles or practices which we could relate to academic disciplines or funding bodies. It was thus not possible for us to fit the use of quotations into a general typology.

However, we believe our general findings which follow are important for informing both the way in which people read text based on qualitative social research, and the way in which researchers write about their findings and interpretations.

Putting together direct evidence from authors and our own interpretation, it appeared that authors selected verbatim material for presentation on the following bases:

- as the basis for their study, and the matter for enquiry
- as evidence contributing to an author's argument
- as illustration of an argument made by the author
- to illustrate how people understand and experience the world
- to illustrate how people express views and explain feelings
- to demonstrate difference or similarity in views and experiences
- to demonstrate the kind of language used
- to enable people to make their own points
- to make text vivid.
- to demonstrate quantitative perspectives
- to provide exemplars from individual cases alongside statistical findings.

Overall, the above list is very similar to the list of suggestions made by a group of research users asked, in a separate component of our study, for their views about why researchers included quotations in their publications (Corden and Sainsbury, 2006b).

For us, what was interesting was how much authors were depending on readers making correct assumptions about the purpose of the verbatim material. When there are no direct explanations from authors, and few clues or indications such as might come in discussions about the theoretical basis for the study, authors take some risks in leaving readers to decide themselves the significance of material presented. Readers may get it wrong. For example, we know that some readers who assume that quotations illustrate the author's points believe they can omit reading quotations without losing the substance of the arguments (Corden and Sainsbury, 2006b). Such

readers might miss opportunities to understand how people make sense of their world, if this was the author's real purpose in including the verbatim material.

Another aspect of selection of material in which there was considerable lack of transparency was in the spread of research participants whose words were used by each author. Depending on the purpose of the quotations, individual authors might have had good reason to try to represent some words spoken by all participants; or, by contrast, to draw repeatedly from only a small selection of transcripts. Without explanation, there was risk in readers making wrong assumptions and drawing wrong conclusions about the significance of the material.

The way in which verbatim words were attributed, and the descriptors and names attached to quotations raised, for us, several important issues of anonymity, and the potential for creation in readers' minds of class, age and cultural identities of the research participants, beyond the intention and control of the author. Authors may make decisions about editing the transcript excerpts, and these also are likely to contribute to the identities of participants in the minds of readers. Few authors discussed such aspects of their publication, and there was little evidence that they had consulted with those whose words they used.

As individuals, we had personal views about the way quotations had been used in these publications. We appreciated the scholarship and skill with which authors had crafted some of these publications, weaving narrative and verbatim words into an interesting and informative account. By contrast, some publications in which we saw numerous short quotations but rather little interpretation and analysis raised questions in our own minds about the quality of the work. Some combinations of narrative text, verbatim words, and descriptors used in attributions raised further questions for us about maintaining anonymity and confidentiality. We also recognised that for us, individually, spoken words which came as a shock, or reflected our own personal experience and feelings, made particular impact. These kinds of assessments are subjective; other readers would have different views. However, we believe issues which have emerged by making verbatim quotations the focus of this review of texts should be subject to wider discussion and debate, in considering aspects of quality and good practice in social research.

The final, forthcoming working paper from this overall study is a literature and research review of conceptual and theoretical arguments for using verbatim quotations in presenting findings. When that is completed, we shall be a position to compare the theoretical arguments for presentation of verbatim material with what we have found to be the practice in reports of significant research; what researchers say they do in this respect; what impact the verbatim material has on readers, and the views of those who speak the words which are presented. This will enable us to reflect on what is currently happening in reporting findings from qualitative social research, and make some suggestions about good practice in writing.

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