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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Langtree, T., Birks, M., & Biedermann, N. (2019). Separating "Fact" from fiction: strategies to improve rigour in historical research. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 20(2), 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-20.2.3196>

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## Separating "Fact" from Fiction: Strategies to Improve Rigour in Historical Research

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**Key words:**

historical method;  
historical research;  
qualitative  
research; rigour;  
trustworthiness

**Abstract:** Since the 1980s, many fields of qualitative research have adopted LINCOLN and GUBA's (1985) four criteria for determining rigour (credibility, confirmability, dependability and transferability) to evaluate the quality of research outputs. Historical research is one field of qualitative inquiry where this is not the case. While most historical researchers recognise the need to be rigorous in their methods in order to improve the trustworthiness of their results, ambiguity exists about how rigour is demonstrated in historical research. As a result, strategies to establish rigour remain focused on piecemeal activities (e.g., source criticism) rather than adopting a whole-of-study approach. Using a piecemeal approach makes it difficult for others to understand the researcher's rationale for the methods used and decisions made during the research process. Fragmenting approaches to rigour may contribute to questioning of the legitimacy of historical methods. In this article, we provide a critique of the challenges to achieving rigour that currently exist in historical research. We then offer practical strategies that can be incorporated into historical methods to address these challenges with the aim of producing a more transparent historical narrative.

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## 1. Introduction

Rigour reflects a researcher's ability to demonstrate competence, integrity and ethics while conducting and reporting on the study (TOBIN & BEGLEY, 2004). In qualitative research, rigour is synonymous with quality and is demonstrated by evidencing the trustworthiness of the research findings to others (LINCOLN & GUBA, 1985). How rigour is achieved, however, remains an elusive concept for many qualitative researchers. In part, this elusiveness is complicated by the very nature of qualitative research—it consists of a heterogeneous array of methodologies and methods, making it impossible for a uniform approach to be used in demonstrating and assessing rigour (MORSE, 2015; SANDELOWSKI, 1986). Further contributing to this confusion are the multifarious meanings that are assigned to the terms rigour, trustworthiness and quality (SPRINGETT,

ATKEY, KONGATS, ZULLA & WILKINS, 2016). Such variations can distort how some researchers perceive the construct of rigour. For example, a construct that equates rigour to legitimate research can drive researchers to engage in futile attempts of "proving" their findings using scientific methods even though the data themselves are inherently nonscientific (MAYRING, 2007; MAYS & POPE, 2000; TOBIN & BEGLEY, 2004; ZHAO, LI, ROSS & DENNIS, 2016). [1]

Returning to the seminal work of LINCOLN and GUBA (1985) can assist researchers to reframe their understanding of rigour. In the 1980s, LINCOLN and GUBA introduced four criteria for establishing rigour in qualitative inquiry: credibility, confirmability, dependability and transferability. Credibility, comparable to internal validity in quantitative studies, is the confidence that the research findings are a truthful representation (SANDELOWSKI, 1986; TOBIN & BEGLEY, 2004). Credibility is determined by assessing the plausibility of the researcher's interpretation and analysis compared to the original dataset (BAILLIE, 2015; KORSTJENS & MOSER, 2018; PRION & ADAMSON, 2014). Transferability is comparable to external validity or generalisability in quantitative research (MORSE, 2015; TOBIN & BEGLEY, 2004). It determines whether the findings are potentially applicable to another individual, group, time, context or setting (BAILLIE, 2015). In order to evaluate the potential of transferability, concepts and theories emerging from the original study first need to be decontextualised and abstracted (LINCOLN & GUBA, 1985; MORSE, 2015). Providing a "thick description", a term popularised by GEERTZ in 1973, of the findings is therefore essential for promoting transferability (MORSE, 2015; POLIT & BECK, 2010). Dependability, comparable to the concept of reliability in quantitative studies, refers to the stability or consistency of the research processes used during the study (TOBIN & BEGLEY, 2004). Dependability is evaluated by considering the decisions made and steps taken during the research process (PRION & ADAMSON, 2014). Confirmability, comparable to objectivity or neutrality in quantitative studies, verifies that the findings stand impervious to the researcher's characteristics, biases or assumptions (BAILLIE, 2015; SHENTON, 2004; TOBIN & BEGLEY, 2004). Despite being introduced over thirty years ago, these criteria are still widely accepted as being appropriate tools for planning and evaluating the research process in most types of qualitative research (MORSE, 2015). [2]

Qualitative historical research is one area where this is not the case. While authors commonly cite the need to be rigorous when conducting historical research, few authors have explained how rigour can be applied to this methodology (GILL, GILL & ROULET, 2018). It is unclear why this predicament exists; however, there is some concern that the application of a contemporary process (such as LINCOLN and GUBA's criteria) will create an ahistorical piece of historical research (TILLY, 2001). Other authors have also indicated that LINCOLN and GUBA's criteria lack the appropriate temporospatial (time and space) considerations needed for historical research (GILL et al., 2018). Nonetheless, these concerns are unproven and contradict one of the guiding principles that is common in all forms of qualitative research: the need for researchers to demonstrate "temporal sensitivity" while analysing human experiences (SANDELOWSKI, 1986; VAN MAANEN, 1983). [3]

What is evident in the literature is the historical researcher's tendency to adopt a piecemeal approach for establishing rigour. For example, while historical researchers place emphasis on source criticism as a way to establish credibility, little attention is given to how their analysis of the source can influence others' interpretations (FULLERTON, 2011). This haphazardness may be due to how novice researchers learn the skills used in historical method. Novice researchers tend to learn these skills by immersion; therefore, they may lack the theoretical principles that underpin such skills (GUNN & FAIRE, 2016 [2012]). Consequently, the novice researcher may not fully appreciate how weak methodological practices, including an inattention to rigour, can potentially skew the results of a study (ibid.). The novice researcher's ability to develop such skills is likely further hindered by the small number of practical guides on historical method that are available as well as their limited discussion on how to achieve or evaluate rigour (FULLERTON, 2011; LANGE, 2013). As a result, ambiguity persists regarding how to conduct rigorous historical research (L'ESTRANGE, 2014). [4]

The uncertainty that surrounds historical methods is a significant methodological weakness. It contributes to other researchers perceiving historical research as being an obscure, un-learnable process (ibid.); or more radically, to query its legitimacy as an authentic field of qualitative research (CHRISTY, 1975; HUME, 2017). In order to address this limitation, it is timely to explore how rigour can improve the transparency and quality of this field of qualitative inquiry. The aim of this article is to provide a critique of the challenges to achieving rigour that currently exist in historical research. In order to contextualise these challenges, the foundations of historical method will first be described (Sections 2.1-2.4). Strategies that can be incorporated into historical methods to address these challenges will then be outlined. Such strategies can aid in the development of a more transparent narrative, thereby allowing others to more accurately evaluate the quality of the products of historical research. [5]

## **2. Improving Rigour**

Historical method is an umbrella term for a group of qualitative methods that explore the what, when, why and how of a past event, epoch or phenomenon (BOLDT, 2014; SARNECKY, 1990). Types of historical method include Rankean (also referred to as empirical/traditional); constructionist; and postmodernist (also referred to as poststructuralist or deconstructionist; DONNELLY & NORTON, 2011; MUNSLOW, 2006 [1997]). While the epistemology and ontology of each type of historical method differs, they are all dependent on source analysis in order to assemble an interpretative account of the past (MUNSLOW, 2006 [1997]). The historical research process is typically broken into four different stages: understanding types of sources; searching and collating sources; source criticism and analysis; and, dissemination (SHAFER, 1974 [1969]). During each stage of the research process, the researcher needs to implement strategies that strengthen and demonstrate the overall rigour of the study. [6]

## 2.1 Understanding types of sources

The first phase, *understanding types of sources*, involves the historical researcher developing an awareness of the types of evidence that are available for use. The historical researcher needs to be able to discern the differences between primary and secondary sources. A primary (original) source is a manuscript that was written during the period being investigated (SALEVOURIS & FURAY, 2015 [1988]). Primary sources serve as evidence that the event or phenomenon being investigated actually occurred (MARWICK, 2001). These sources include officially produced "documents of record" (e.g., census records; births, marriage and deaths registrations), personal files (e.g., letters, diaries), organisational documents, audio-visual materials (e.g., film or media coverage), oral histories, art, and other artefacts (e.g., archaeological relics) (MAGES & FAIRMAN, 2008; MARWICK, 2001). [7]

In contrast, a secondary source is normally a manuscript that is written post-event (SALEVOURIS & FURAY, 2015 [1988]). Secondary sources can be used by the researcher to help locate other primary sources that may be relevant to the study; to assist with understanding the context of the event/period being studied; and, to help determine the authenticity and accuracy of the primary source (MAGES & FAIRMAN, 2008; SALEVOURIS & FURAY, 2015 [1988]). [8]

Source classification assists the historical researcher with determining what types of sources will be most useful for the study. Overlooking source classification may result in the researcher failing to locate an exhaustive list of appropriate source materials, or becoming overly dependent on secondary sources (SHAFER, 1974 [1969]). Accordingly, the credibility of the findings are potentially weakened as the analysis and subsequent interpretation are founded on either an incomplete or a far-removed dataset (LUSK, 1997). [9]

In order to address these concerns, researchers need to spend time in the early stages of planning their study to consider what types of sources they intend to use (DONNELLY & NORTON, 2011). By reflecting on the range of potential sources available, the researcher is able to identify the need for any specialised assistance or equipment to assist with source evaluation, such as translation requirements (*ibid.*, see also SHAFER, 1974 [1969]). Undertaking this reflection also enables the researcher to contemplate which type(s) of sources will best answer the research question (PRESNELL, 2013 [2007]). Performing this reflection assists the researcher to identify the strengths and limitations of different source types, including addressing the question of reliability. [10]

The reliability of sources that rely on memory rather than direct observation is a constant area of concern (HEINTZE, 1976; MARWICK, 2001; MEGILL, 2007). Types of sources affected by the "fallibility of memory" include oral histories, autobiographies and memoirs (DONNELLY & NORTON, 2011; PRESNELL, 2013 [2007]). The lapse in time between event and source production coupled with the participant's recall ability can result in a skewed account of the event where pertinent information is inadvertently left out of the testimony (BOSCHMA,

SCAIA, BONIFACIO & ROBERTS, 2008; SALEVOURIS & FURAY, 2015 [1988]). This phenomenon has been described as an "erosion of reliability" (BRUNDAGE, 2013 [1989], p.22). These types of sources are further prone to the influence of participants' personal biases and motives (LEWENSON, 2008; MARWICK, 2001). There are numerous reasons why this encroachment may occur, ranging from unintentional motives (e.g., where participants omit relevant information because they perceive it to be unuseful; SAFIER, 1976); to more subconscious variables (e.g., the participant represses painful memories as a form of self-protection; BIEDERMANN, 2001). Alternatively, the inclusion or exclusion of information may be due to self-serving reasons (ibid.; see also BRUNDAGE, 2013 [1989]). For instance, participants may fail to disclose salacious information for self-preservation or embellish their role in the event. [11]

By critiquing the types of sources that will be most likely used in the study, the researcher can begin to implement preemptive strategies in order to address such limitations. For example, the researcher who chooses to use oral histories as the main source of evidence may decide to: corroborate the participant's recollections with secondary sources; collect a number of oral histories from several different participants about the same event; or, incorporate other types of primary sources (e.g., written accounts) into the analysis (LEWENSON, 2008). Such techniques assist with evaluating the level of subjectivity embedded in the account through applying the principles of triangulation. In turn, this strengthens the credibility of the interpretation (GILL et al., 2018). [12]

## **2.2 Searching and collating sources (data collection)**

The search and collation of sources is guided by the area of study, research aims and questions, as well as predetermined parameters such as the period or setting that is being studied. Other than determining the topic and period that is being studied, historical researchers do not tend to clearly define their search strategy prior to commencing the study. The searching and collating stage has traditionally been undertaken in an archive (SHAFER, 1974 [1969]). While many researchers continue to prefer working in a physical archive, the internet has enabled alternative methods for collecting evidence such as the use of digital libraries, databases and online repositories (VILAR & ŠAUPERL, 2015). [13]

During data collection, the historical researcher records the bibliographical details of each source. These records typically include the technical aspects of the source including title, authorship, publisher, year, publication location, purpose, and archive location (physical and online) (JORDANOVA, 2016 [2012]; SHAFER, 1974 [1969]). Preliminary notes about the source's content and usefulness are also recommended to assist the historical researcher in organising the data (i.e., determining areas for further investigation) (SHAFER, 1974 [1969]). [14]

In historical method, the search for sources is moderately governed by factors that are extraneous to the study parameters. Factors such as language differences; archive location; source access; budget and time constraints, can threaten the credibility of the findings due to compromising the completeness of

evidence used for interpretation (BURTON, 2005; DALTON & CHARNIGO, 2004). While many of the decisions made regarding these practicalities are justifiable from a practical standpoint, there is the risk that this "make do" attitude can corrupt the evidentiary base from which the analysis is conducted (HUME, 2017; LEWENSON, 2008). Threats to credibility may also result in situations where archives restrict the copying or photography of original sources as the future analysis and interpretation of a source will most likely be based on the historical researcher's notes rather than the original source (BURTON, 2005; GIVEN & WILLSON, 2018). Hence, there is a risk that content of the source may be inadvertently misrepresented or misappropriated. [15]

Although historical researchers spend considerable time researching which archives and collections are most likely to yield relevant sources, this careful planning does not necessarily limit the serendipitous element of locating primary sources. The serendipitous discovery of primary sources commonly occurs during the "browsing" of secondary sources' footnotes and references (DALTON & CHARNIGO, 2004; GIVEN & WILLSON, 2018; TOMS & O'BRIEN, 2008; TRACE & KARADKAR, 2017). "Browsing" supports the inclusivity of potential sources and allows the researcher to develop a deep understanding of what is already known about the subject. However, when left unregulated it can snowball into an ad-hoc activity where the historical researcher loses sight of the planned search strategy (DELGADILLO & LYNCH, 1999; MAGES & FAIRMAN, 2008; TRACE & KARADKAR, 2017). As a result, the dependability of the study may become jeopardised due to the researcher being unable to clearly describe the decisions made during the search process (e.g., why a potential source was included or excluded from the study; what constitutes data saturation). [16]

Conducting an unstructured search also presents a threat to the confirmability of the research, as the researcher may be unaware of the presence of personal biases (HALLETT, 2008). Such biases can potentially cloud the decisions made during the search and may result in a misjudgement about a particular source. For example, a source that is deemed erroneous or contradictory to the sentiments detailed in other sources may be wrongly excluded from the study if the researcher does not explore how the emerging narrative portrayed in the other sources may be affecting the (preliminary) analysis of the event (ibid.). [17]

The development of a search protocol can assist in mitigating many of these expected and unexpected issues that are encountered in historical research (MACKIESON, SHLONSKY & CONNOLLY, 2018). When developing the protocol, historical researchers need to determine the research question and aims, key search terms, the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the proposed search strategies (e.g., databases, archives), the type of sources used (e.g., digital versus analogue sources; artefacts), and how the data will be stored and recorded (e.g., the use of reference management and/or spreadsheet software; MORRIS, 2016 [2012]). By articulating these decisions, historical researchers are able to preempt many of the hurdles likely to be faced during the search and take preventive steps to minimise their imposition on the search (e.g., securing appropriate funding). Once developed, the protocol should be reviewed and

updated regularly to reflect the search outcomes and any encountered issues. This practice serves as an audit trail that improves the study's dependability as it assists researchers to remain accountable for their decisions and actions during the search (MACKIESON et al., 2018; TRACE & KARADKAR, 2017). [18]

### 2.3 Source criticism and analysis

The next stage of historical method is *source criticism and analysis*. During this stage, each collected source undergoes further analysis and interpretation via the application of internal and external criticism. External criticism is the process in which the historical researcher determines the authenticity of the source (CHRISTY, 1975; SALEVOURIS & FURAY, 2015 [1988]). This is also referred to as determining provenance (WOOD, 2011). For written sources, many of the steps used to evaluate authenticity coincide with determining the bibliographical record of the source. Internal criticism is the process in which accuracy, reliability and credibility of the source is determined (SALEVOURIS & FURAY, 2015 [1988]; SHAFER, 1974 [1969]). In order to assess the source's accuracy, the researcher needs to consider the purpose, context and veracity of each source (WOOD, 2011). [19]

Once external and internal criticism are applied to the sources, the evidence is synthesised. This step requires the historical researcher to construct the information derived from the sources into an account to describe or explain the event or problem being studied (SHAFER, 1974 [1969]). The type of historical research used in the study determines how the historical researcher undertakes this analysis: a reconstruction or description of the event (Rankean/empirical method); a deconstruction of the event (postmodernist); or, meaning is constructed about the event (constructionist; MUNSLOW, 1997). [20]

A major criticism of historical research is the ambiguity that surrounds the decisions made by the researcher during the data analysis phase (GUNN & FAIRE, 2016 [2012]). While the reader can determine what sources were used in the analysis by referring to the citation information contained in the narrative, the processes for determining which sources were included or excluded from the study is sometimes less clear. The failure to clearly disclose such processes can lead to concerns regarding the appraisal of evidence including: Did the researcher use a specific method or appraisal tool to document how each source was evaluated for authenticity and accuracy?; Were pre-determined inclusion and exclusion criteria applied during the appraisal of sources (e.g., timeframe, setting, context or language restrictions)?; and, How did the researcher keep track of source details (e.g., handwritten notes or the creation of bibliographical records)? [21]

Failing to adequately address any of these elements during the initial phase of source criticism can affect the credibility and dependability of the study as using an unstructured appraisal tool and/or tracking method may result in the inclusion of a fake source or the inadvertent omission of a source that is pertinent to the study. Using a nebulous approach to source evaluation, particularly the failure to apply inclusion and exclusion criteria, can also impact the confirmability of the



study as the researcher's personal biases may influence the appraisal process. Adopting a methodological approach to source criticism, such as the use of a standardised appraisal tool, decreases this risk as it promotes consistency and therefore dependability (MACKIESON et al., 2018). Using a simple tool such as WOOD's (2011) five-part checklist (provenance, purpose, context, veracity and usefulness) for evaluating historical sources facilitates this process, allowing the researcher to document the outcomes for future reference. [22]

The credibility of the study can also be impacted by the way in which the researcher manages a source that is found to be incongruent to other sources examined. Differing models of historical method can influence how a paradoxical source is handled. For example, historical researchers who adopt a Rankean method will value official documents (e.g., court records) over discursive sources (e.g., letters) as the latter is viewed to be subjective (DONNELLY & NORTON, 2011). Postmodernist historical researchers argue that all sources, regardless of their origin or type, include an element of interpretation as the intentionality of the original author remains unknown (ibid., see also MUNSLOW, 2002). When considering how to handle the contradictory source, the researcher needs to analyse the lexicon and context (e.g., sociocultural and political climate) of the period being investigated as this may influence how information is presented within the source (McCULLAGH, 1991). By adopting this strategy, the historical researcher is able to consider each source in its context and identify possible overt and covert reasons why the source may be different to the wider frame of discourse (BARROS, CARNEIRO & WANDERLEY, 2018; MANSELL, 1999). For example, the language used in a court record is more formal and constrained than a personal account such as that conveyed in a letter or journal entry. [23]

Another strategy that can be used to limit the risk of mismanaging a paradoxical source is to adopt a GADAMERian hermeneutic approach to the interpretation (HALLETT, 2008). GADAMER's approach to hermeneutics promotes a bridge between the past and present that allows the researcher to balance the source author's original intentions (the "then") with the researcher's own beliefs (the "now") to generate new knowledge through a *Horizontverschmelzung* ("fusion of horizons"; BRADSHAW, 2013; GADAMER, 1979 [1960], p.539; HALLETT, 2008). This approach recognises that reading a source never occurs in isolation (BOELL & CECEZ-KECMANOVIC, 2010). Instead, it acknowledges researchers' interpretations are influenced by their worldviews, prior knowledge and a range of assumptions, biases, and contextual factors (HALLETT, 2008). The GADAMERian approach also acknowledges that a researcher's interpretation is constantly evolving due to the formation of a "circle of understanding", enabling the researcher to revise the interpretation as more reading and analysis takes place (BOELL & CECEZ-KECMANOVIC, 2010; GADAMER, 1979 [1960]; HALLETT, 2008). [24]

The methods used during data analysis can also impact on the credibility of the study. Unlike other fields of qualitative research where the analysis methods (e.g., thematic analysis, codification) are clearly described to the reader, the ways in which data is extracted from validated sources, interpreted and organised into

a narrative are seldom included in the historical narrative (SINN & SOARES, 2014). Failing to include these details creates uncertainty about a study's credibility as it is unclear to readers how the data have been scrutinised to enable the development of an informed interpretation. Hence, readers are unable to adequately discern if the researcher's interpretation of the event is plausible (MACKIESON et al., 2018). [25]

To address this limitation, historical researchers can utilise diagrammatical techniques, such as concept mapping, to help deepen their analysis. Concept mapping assists the researcher to explore and elucidate the initial inferences by creating a visual representation of the study's key concepts and corroborating evidence (DAVIES, 2011). Mapping out these variables encourages researchers to explore their reasoning by confirming causal relationships and highlighting potential associations, while also exposing areas that require further investigation (ibid.). [26]

Memoing, a strategy predominantly used in ground theory methodology, can also assist researchers to critique preliminary inferences (BIRKS, CHAPMAN & FRANCIS, 2008; CHARMAZ, 2015). Memo-writing assists researchers to refine their inferences by generating new ideas and exploring emerging patterns or associations that may be present in the sources (BIRKS et al., 2008; SALDANA, 2016 [2009]). Engaging in this process can assist in the construction of a meaningful and evidence-based interpretation, as researchers are encouraged to reflect and expound their thinking (CHARMAZ, 2015; SALDANA, 2016 [2009]). In historical research, memos can be used to: explore conjectures between seemingly unrelated data; question the nature of corroborating evidence; question the nature of conflicting data; identify the unknowns; and, examine how temporospatial considerations and context may have influenced the event. Examining each of these different areas allows researchers to take risks with their interpretation, as they are encouraged to investigate the extracted information from multiple perspectives (BIRKS et al., 2008). By taking these risks, researchers are more likely to develop a deeper understanding of the research topic (BIRKS et al., 2008; CHARMAZ, 2015). The preservation of such thought processes then acts as an audit tool for the researcher, thereby strengthening the dependability of the study (BIRKS et al., 2008). [27]

Seeking feedback from others is another strategy to confirm the cogency of the analysis. Communicating with an expert historian who is familiar with the subject matter can aid researchers in clarifying their thought processes through checking their inferences are congruous with what is already known about the topic (GILL et al., 2018). Alternatively, if oral histories are used, researchers can use member-checking to clarify if their interpretation of the event is consistent with the participant's interpretation and lived experience (BIEDERMANN, 2001; GILL et al., 2018). The implementation of these strategies strengthens the credibility of a study as the interpretation is triangulated with other corroborating evidence (BOWEN, 2009; LINCOLN & GUBA, 1985). [28]

Recognising the potential presence of unconscious biases, such as the influence of a prevailing metanarrative, is another important strategy to strengthen the analysis. Metanarratives are grand unifying systems of thoughts and beliefs that are accepted as the truth without exception (DU TOIT, 2011). Unmonitored metanarratives can distort a historical researcher's understanding of an event by introducing subjectivity into the interpretation—an already inherent risk of conducting historical research (CARR, 1961; DONNELLY & NORTON, 2011; HAMPSON, 1976; MUNSLOW, 2002). If left unchecked, these metanarratives can threaten the study's confirmability and credibility as it may lead the researcher to ignore a potentially plausible yet unorthodox explanation as it goes against popular or widely accepted discourse (BOWEN, 2009). [29]

Another unconscious bias that may influence a researcher's analysis is the presence of apophenia. Apophenia, also known as patternicity, refers to the identification of connections or meaningful patterns in disparate data, where no such relationship exists (FYFE, WILLIAMS, MASON & PICKUP, 2008; PAUL, MONDA, OLAUSSON & REED-DALEY, 2014; SHERMER, 2008). There is some evidence that individuals who regularly use pattern recognition in their profession (e.g., qualitative researchers, nurses, doctors) may be more prone to apophenia because they use this skill to inform their ways of knowing (BUETOW, 2019). If undetected, the presence of apophenia can result in the researcher using the sources to construct a fictional interpretation of the past event, thereby destroying the study's credibility (BUETOW, 2019). [30]

An inattention to these two unconscious biases may not only skew the data to privilege a false narrative, it also has ethical implications for the historical researcher (FINLAY, 2002; SANDELOWSKI, 1986). In order to minimise the risk of such biases influencing the interpretation, it is essential to consider each possible interpretation in context so that any (past and present) metanarratives, biases and other uncertainties can be identified and resolved (WOOD, 2011). Furthermore, engaging in reflexive activities can encourage the researcher to become more self-aware of potential biases and assumptions (CUNLIFFE, 2004). [31]

Reflexive techniques that may be useful to historical researchers include journaling and introspection. Regular reflection through journaling enables researchers to examine how their own subjective influences (e.g., preconceived notions or assumptions) may be influencing the analysis (BIRKS et al., 2008; CUNLIFFE, 2004). Through this articulation, researchers are then able to organise, critically evaluate and reconceptualise their thinking, resulting in the generation of new insights and understanding (ibid.). In contrast, introspection is a technique where researchers view themselves from an "outsider's" perspective in order to consider how underlying assumptions may be affecting their interpretation (BUETOW, 2019; FINLAY, 2002). Taking an "outsider's" perspective encourages researchers to question their decision-making during the analysis; and assists in identifying potential "blind spots" (FINLAY, 2002). These strategies enable researchers to become better aware of their own positionality within the study (BIRKS et al., 2008; FINEFTER-ROSENBLUH, 2017). In turn,

this increased awareness enables a deeper interpretation of the data, serving to strengthen the credibility and confirmability of the study. [32]

## 2.4 Dissemination

Outcomes of the analysis are disseminated via the historical narrative. While there are no specific rules that govern how the narrative should be written (i.e., it is researcher-dependent), some general recommendations exist regarding language use and the mechanics of writing (MEGILL, 2007). A neutral tone and objective language style are recommended (SHAFER, 1974 [1969]). Objectivity is promoted by the use of expository prose, a style of writing where the researcher presents (*exposes*) the material and explicates its meaning (DONNELLY & NORTON, 2011; LARSON, 1968). The narrative should demonstrate inclusiveness where all relevant sources are incorporated into the prose; and, any omissions or knowledge gaps are declared and justified to the reader to proffer a transparent account of the study topic (DONNELLY & NORTON, 2011). [33]

Recommendations also exist for the structural organisation of the narrative. The information included in the narrative needs to be presented as a lucid and coherent argument (*ibid.*). Direct quotes are used to elicit empathic responses in the reader and to demonstrate the judgements and conclusions made by the researcher during the analysis (LEWENSON, 2008; SHAFER, 1974 [1969]). Footnotes regarding source information and location are included in the narrative to guide the reader "to know *how* the writer knows" (GOTTSCHALK, 1969 [1950], p.19). Their inclusion helps to substantiate the historical researcher's analysis and interpretation. A second function of the footnote is to provide reference to other scholarly works that corroborate the researcher's argument (SHAFER, 1974 [1969]). In this case, the footnote validates the research by enabling the demonstration of inter-coherence with other scholarly works (DONNELLY & NORTON, 2011). The third function of the footnote is to provide additional information about a concept in circumstances where its inclusion in the prose is extraneous to the central tenets of the argument (i.e., it would interrupt the flow of the narrative; SHAFER, 1974 [1969]). Located at the end of the narrative are endnotes (longer explanatory comments that pertain to the entire topic), bibliographical references, and appendices (*ibid.*). [34]

The main mechanism for confirming rigour in historical research is via the narrative. A fundamental step in establishing rigour is the researcher's acknowledgement that the historical narrative is used not merely to retell a story about the past, but rather is a tool for dissemination that *affects* and *effects* others' understandings and opinions of the historical event (BARROS et al., 2018; MARWICK, 2001; MUNSLOW, 1997; WHITE, 1984). The primary reason for this power is the writing style used in the narrative (WHITE, 1984). As with any literary form, the writing style used by the historical researcher can mediate meaning-production in the reader through the use of semiotic mediation and the development of emphatic literacy (MORGAN & HENNING, 2013; VYGOTSKY, 2012 [1962]). Thus, the narrative can be seen not only as a vehicle of communication but also a vehicle of *persuasion*. The techniques used in crafting

historical narratives have traditionally paralleled many of the elements of fictional writing (e.g., the use of emplotment to chronicle events) and it is these discourse similarities that have arguably compromised the credibility of historical research (BARROS et al., 2018; GILL et al., 2018). If handled poorly, there is the risk that the narrative becomes a literary output where novelistic tendencies (e.g., description, dramatisation) are prioritised over scientific pursuits (e.g., analysis; WHITE, 1984). It is imperative that historical researchers present the narrative as a logical, transparent argument to maximise the reader's ability to make a sound judgement about the study and avoid the temptation "to engage the reader in a suspenseful, dramatic ... account of the study" (LEWENSON, 2008, p.40). Reflexivity can again be used as a strategy to assist this process by prompting researchers to evaluate (and realign) their writing style in order to separate "fact" from fiction (BARROS et al., 2018). [35]

Threats to a study's credibility also exist when the historical researcher fails to overtly disclose how the arguments made within the narrative are constructed (GILL et al., 2018). This predicament can arise when key elements are omitted from the narrative such as providing the evidence that a wide range of primary and secondary sources were used to develop and validate the researcher's interpretation. To counteract this risk, evidence can be provided through the prudent use of direct quotes, footnotes and endnotes placed throughout the narrative as a mechanism to substantiate claims and provide additional relevant information or bibliographical details about a particular source (SHAFER, 1974 [1969]). [36]

The historical researcher can strengthen the dependability of the study by providing a comprehensive description of the study design in the narrative. While this is an unorthodox approach (compared to the norms of a traditional narrative), descriptors that detail the search strategy, analysis methods and tools used to monitor biases, help the reader to evaluate the integrity of the study. Detailing the strategies employed to minimise potential biases to the reader also demonstrates how confirmability is promoted within the study. [37]

A failure to communicate these explanatory details in the narrative potentially causes a segregation of the research process from its end-product, the historical narrative. We describe this segregation as creating a "temporal apartheid"—symbolising the key processing, analytical and interpretative functions that occur within the temporal lobes of the human brain (HICKEY, 2013 [1981]). The outcome of this "apartheid" is that readers may be unable to follow the logic behind the researcher's suppositions, leading them to question the quality of the narrative. The use of this term is an extension of LEE's (2011) application where he described "temporal apartheid" as the misconception that a void separates the past and present. [38]

### 3. Conclusion

Qualitative historical research is a field of inquiry that examines a past event, epoch or phenomenon. Many of the methods used and decisions made throughout the historical research process are governed by the accessibility of sources, the physical environment and conditions imposed within an archive, yet these factors and their impact on the study design are somewhat understated in the historical narrative. Failing to divulge and rationalise such information, makes it difficult for others to evaluate the rigour of the study findings as they are unable to discriminate how the researcher's interpretation of the event is situated within the evidence. Such inarticulation compromises the overall trustworthiness and quality of the study, and reduces the acceptance of historical methodology as a whole. In order to address this methodological weakness, historical researchers can incorporate various strategies into the research process. Any strategy used to promote rigour in the historical study needs to be effectively communicated to the reader in the narrative. This initiative will reduce the ambiguity that surrounds historical methods through strengthening methodological literacy by separating "fact" from fiction. [39]

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## Citation

Langtree, Tanya; Birks, Melanie & Biedermann, Narelle (2019). Separating "Fact" from Fiction: Strategies to Improve Rigour in Historical Research [39 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 20(2), Art. 26, <http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-20.2.3196>.