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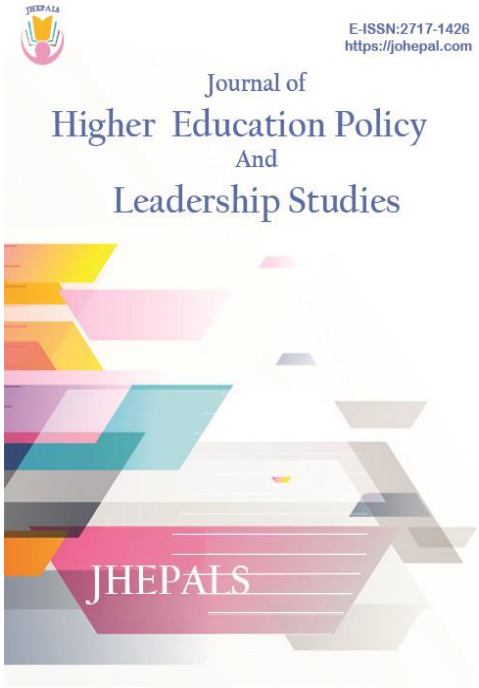

Becoming a Qualitative Methodologist: Interview with Dr. Janet Salmons

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Interview

Becoming a Qualitative Methodologist: Interview with Dr. Janet Salmons

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Janet Salmons *

I'm a free-range scholar, qualitative methodologist, writer, and artist. I edit a monthly newsletter on Substack, When the Field is Online. Follow my posts, register for events, or get in touch on LinkedIn or Bluesky. Find my books with Sage Publishing and my books with Routledge. I am a fellow at the Center for Advanced Internet Studies in Bochum, Germany and was a scholar in residence from April to June of 2024.

I previously served as the Research Community Manager for Sage Methodspace, where I wrote about research designs and methods, and ways to teach and guide researchers, and share results. I also conduct interviews with researchers and offer webinars.

My most recent books are: *What kind of researcher are you?* (2021), *Reframing and Rethinking Collaboration in Higher Education and Beyond: A Practical Guide for Doctoral Students and Early Career Researchers* with Narelle Lemon (2021), *Publishing from your Doctoral Research: Create and Use a Publication Strategy* with Helen Kara (2020), *Learning to Collaborate, Collaborating to Learn* (2019), *Find the Theory in Your Research* (2019), *Getting Data Online* (2019), and *Doing Qualitative Research Online* (2016).

When I am not engaged with writing about research, I enjoy art journaling, watercolor, and other creative activities. I run creative writing groups and offer art workshops in-person and online.

I live and work in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains in Boulder, Colorado.

https://www.linkedin.com/in/jsalmons/
https://salmons.blog/
https://cais-research.de/en/fellows/janet-salmons/

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Salmons, J.

Interviews with internationally acclaimed figures within the domain of higher education policy and leadership provides us with fresh insights gained from many years of working experience, knowledge, and research. Dr. Janet Salmons is globally renowned for her in-depth knowledge and expertise within the realm of Research Methodology (QUAL specifically); as well as her more than three decades of experience in alignment with her eclectic, inter-disciplinary interests as methods innovation, collaboration, creativity, and ethics in a digital world. JHEPALS is honored to publish an interview with Dr. Janet Salmons; and we are confident that Dr. Janet's critical, thought-provoking, and valuable responses intertwined with her research experience in higher education will be interesting to a wide range of audience, including journal publishers, editors-in-chief, researchers, (post)graduate students, and policy-makers in higher education.

Question #1

We are much delighted to hear more details about your journey as a student during K-12 and higher education up to now as a globally renowned scholar.

Answer:

Three types of educational experiences influenced me most:

- Getting lost in the stacks

One of my most formative experiences came when I learned how to take the public bus from my suburban home to Baltimore where I wandered around Enoch Pratt Library. I found all kinds of books that I could not understand, but I discovered a world of ideas that I wanted to join. As my educational journey progressed my love for libraries has grown, whether browsing physical shelves or databases.

- Learning in action with practica and field projects

The learning experiences that have stuck with me involved application of ideas and strategies in a real-world setting.

- Excellent mentors and professors

I was fortunate to have mentors and professors who challenged and me. They recognized potential I wasn't aware of and challenged me to embrace my unique qualities. They modeled creative, interdisciplinary thinking.

When it was my turn to take the roles of mentor and professor, I reflected on their gifts and committed to doing my best with my students. Now when I am writing I think about the importance of clear explanations, just as I did when guiding students through the dissertation process.

Question #2

Can you help us to get a clear image of Dr. Salmons's professional career to choose "Research methodology" as her main field of interest!

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Answer:

As a lifelong reader I always wanted the backstory to any project, but I didn't find a love for empirical research until I was designing my doctoral research. I knew I wanted to discuss the topic of the study, collaborative e-learning, with professors around the world, but I had no travel funding. At the time videoconference tools were new, and I was an early adopter as a webinar presenter. I thought, why can't I use this tool for one-one interviews? I did, using the shared whiteboard for visually-interactive interviews. When I told people about my study, they would stop me and say "wait, how did you do that?"

After the millionth question of that kind I decided to write about the approaches I used, publishing *Qualitative Interviews in Real Time* in 2010. That project got me interested in the *how* of research, and I am still intrigued by the many ways we can study a problem or question.

Question #3

Why QUALITATIVE? Can we say that Dr. Salmons is one of the main figures in QUAL research?

Answer:

Long before I entered a doctoral program, I worked in the theater department at Cornell University, where I developed all kinds of projects that used interactive drama and storytelling for experiential teaching and learning. I found that stories could engage people in candid ways that did not occur with other more straightforward modes of communication. Qualitative research offers a similar opportunity to understand first-person perceptions, perspectives, or experiences, whether we are interacting directly with participants, studying written materials, or reading the literature.

I hope that the work I've put into books about methods, countless webinars, and my current newsletters is helpful to aspiring researchers!

Question #4

You have also works within the realm of Higher Education. How do you see the current state of HE worldwide? What are the priorities? What are the current trends?

Answer:

That is a very big question! As believers in the value of higher education we work in societies characterized by anti-intellectualism and skepticism about science and social science. I think we should collectively prioritize efforts to explain and demonstrate the value of scholarship. That means being able to speak plainly about what we do and show why it makes a difference. We need to share what we learn in practical ways.

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We need to be exemplary in our values and ethical practices. The current wash of AI-generated, error-filled articles is counterproductive. We must do better than that!

Back in the classroom, we must empower and encourage students, using active, collaborative, field- and service-learning activities that invite students to think, do, and reflect. Kolb's 1984 learning cycle and Dewey's 1938 recommendations in *Experience and Education* fit today's needs, and assignments that use this experiential approach can't be readily spit out from an LLM or plagiarized (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984).

Question #5

Have you ever thought about the Research Methodology Preferences and Priorities *worldwide*? In general, and QUAL Research specifically!

Answer:

Yes, definitely important to consider the needs of researchers from around the world. I've learned a lot by interviewing and collaborating with diverse students and academics and make an ongoing effort to keep learning about the interests and constraints for scholars.

My "When the Field is Online" newsletter currently reaches readers in 83 countries and I am on the advisory board of the new Qualitative Research Connect association, with members in the Global South. I am an advocate for the Trust Code, which offers guidelines for respectful international research.

Question #6

How do you see and connect HEIs, Academic Staff, Students, Society, Government, Public/ Private Sector, Industry, Global Partnership, and University Ranking Systems in "Research"?

Answer:

I don't think they are connected, but they need to be! I'm coordinating a small-scale example right now, with a project called Humanizing Online Research. The international, interdisciplinary group includes academic faculty and staff, a doctoral student, research institute staff, independent researchers and a tech company leader. We will meet in Germany at the Center for Advanced Internet Studies next October.

Question #7

What are the previous, current, and future trends in Research Methodology? How do you feel about AI in research?

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Interview

Answer:

I could write all day about how I feel about AI in research, so here is my short answer: no. Nine of my books were stolen by AI companies: no permission requested, no chance to opt out, and of course no compensation. Decades of work done while carrying a full teaching load snapped up by billionaires without any recognition of the effort involved! As a result, I am less than enthusiastic about using words stolen from other writers. I prefer to read and think about published research articles and thoughtful books, then respect their efforts by citing them.

I think qualitative research is a human endeavor, with human researchers trying to understand the human experience. It touches the mind, heart, and soul in ways a bot cannot. I am also concerned by what Amnesty International calls a violation of international human rights laws.

Bottom line: I am confident in the potential for human intelligence and creativity.

Question #8

If you are delivering a keynote speech in a symposium on "Research Methodology"; what advices, suggestions, concerns, and priorities do you highlight for Publishers, Journal Editors, Researchers, and Graduate Students?

Answer:

a) Publishers: Respect writers. Invest in enough staff so writers have the necessary support. I've experienced the best, with editors who had read a book in progress and could discuss fine points such as the best order for chapters, and terrible experiences with no continuity and a different staff person for every interaction. I realize it is a tough business, but attention to detail is essential.

b) Journal Editors: Offer clear guidelines, support rigorous, constructive (AI-free) peer review. Look for ways to expedite reviews so research gets published while it is still relevant.

c) Researchers: Affirm your identity as a scholar and be proud to put your name on the contributions you make. Put ethical practice at the center; understand your social responsibility to offer trustworthy research and usable recommendations.

Respect editors and readers by submitting credible writing that meets the guidelines. Never submit a manuscript you did not write, with fake citations indicating you did not study the literature or proofread your work.

d) Graduate Students: Be curious and explore ideas, both within your own disciplines and across disciplines. Ask questions. Ask your supervisor/chair/mentor for help when needed and follow their advice. Follow suggestions for researchers.

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Join professional or learned societies, find your team, your tribe, your place. Connect with fellow students and other potential collaborative partners. Be generous, encourage others, even if you are in a competitive program

Question #9

We are sure you have extensively reviewed works for journals. What are your main criteria to evaluate "Research Methodology"? How do you see the "Rigour" and "Soundness" of RM?

Answer:

When I review articles, naturally I am interested in the methods used. While the methods section in an article must be concise, I want to know what they did, why, and how. I want to know how they determined what problem merited study, how they negotiated access to settings, or consent of participants. How did they go beyond simple analysis and interpret the data? I consider the design and conduct in relation to the selected methodology. Did they make a compelling case? Does it all fit together? The answers to those questions help me evaluate rigour and soundness of the study.

And finally,

Question #10

What are Dr. Salmons's change of focus in terms of research priorities both as a Research Methodologist and Higher Education researcher over the years?

Answer:

I have become more passionate over time about the value of well-designed and conducted qualitative research as a way to develop new understanding of our rapidly changing world. The priority: do real research about real issues and problems, and share what you learned with scholars and practitioners.

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