

# *All About Qual: Perspectives from Across our Partner Network*

WITH

**Pamela Batzel**

Qualitative Research and Discourse (Language) Analysis Expert

Welcome to *All About Qual*, an ongoing interview series in which we highlight some of the unique methodologies, perspectives, and experiences from our partner network that make qualitative research such a flexible and powerful tool for getting to the “why?” behind the “what?”. In this edition, we sit down with **Pamela Batzel**, Owner of Finch and the Frog, a qualitative research practice in Fort Collins, Colorado.

**Q: Unlike perhaps medicine or law, many market researchers do not *start* their careers in market research – you first worked as a journalist for 11 years. What drove your journey from journalism to market research?**

*I love this question. Short answer: Serendipity. Grace.*

*Newspaper was a great place to start. As a literature major – rather than journalism major – I had to learn on the ground how to interview. I started as a correspondent before getting a full-time position. I got good at being curious and “getting the story.”*

*But working at local newspapers was not sustainable as a long-term career, in part because small newspapers were a dying breed. I wanted something else, but what is a journalist qualified for? I didn’t know. But the moderator I was interviewing one day for a newspaper piece knew. As she was unloading a pile of board games from her car, I got her to talk to me about her tiny town’s general-store-slash-post-office closing and she interrupted me to tell me I was really good and said she’s a good judge because she was a moderator. I looked at her head tilted, questioning look. I had no idea what a moderator was. So, she explained qualitative research, and I immediately thereafter started looking at local market research agencies. Not long after that I got a job in a market research shop in New Hope, a Delaware River town outside Philadelphia.*

**Q: To what extent do you draw on your earlier experiences as a journalist in your work today? What does that perspective give you that you might otherwise lack?**

*In market research, we have discussion guides and that is important; we need to make sure the researcher is on the same page as the client about key questions – and the underlying business context. And that all those questions get covered. But in [the] newspaper [business], interviews didn't happen with a formal, extensive discussion guide. So, I got a lot of experience devising initial and follow-up questions, both ahead of interviews and on the fly. I got comfortable having conversations with people.*

*And feature stories tended to involve longer interviews, which extended the opportunity for having conversations. Here, I could give – and interviewees wanted – space and time to share their story. And I got good at pulling out what was salient.*

*Plus, I was interviewing “officials” – like school district superintendents – in my mid and late 20s – which built confidence and experience in asking questions of experts with expertise outside my own area.*

**Q: Well into your career as a professional researcher, you decided to pursue an advanced degree in Rhetoric from Carnegie Mellon University. What “need” or curiosity were you trying to satisfy? How has your background in rhetoric and discourse helped you as a market researcher?**

*I worked alongside linguists and discourse analysts, analyzing ethnographic, conversational data for multiple years and over that time I'd picked up tools of the trade, so to speak. And I wanted to expand and solidify some of those skills to help in my work, as well as to convey to clients my ongoing investment in and capacities for learning.*

*And personally, I wanted to engage with texts in the ways you do in graduate school.*

*Choosing CMU [Carnegie Mellon University] followed fortunate circumstances. At my previous company, I'd been hiring consultants to analyze social media conversations. Among those were folks from CMU's rhetoric program. I liked how folks from that program used discourse analysis.*

*In the program, I trained in rigorous, close analysis of language data – using both social media communities and news articles – while situating analyses in larger social-political discourse systems to ground interpretations. The work reinforced and extended my*

*ability to make sense of individual's and group's experiences as a holon – as an entity of its own and simultaneously part of a larger system.*

*Understanding a group's nested experience can be useful in understanding how to reach it, and how to speak to it – how to frame messages, what language to use (or not use) and what mood of message can land.*

**Q: A lot of people in our industry talk about what types of clients they *have*, but we'd like to frame it differently: what types of decision makers do you *help*?**

*Such a beautiful and meaningful shift in language.*

*To follow that, I find that clients who are most interested in partnering, most open to ongoing conversations about their needs, about the early insights, the developing insights and final reporting are where we, as their partner, are most able to help. Clients live in their world—including their own company's ways of thinking. To bring researchers into their discourse and systems, that takes dialogue and partnership to ensure alignment.*

*Most commonly, I work with folks from companies' Insights or Market Research departments, which, in turn, support Marketing departments. Of course, the marketing team partners for the kick-off call when discussing study objectives and may or may not get involved in reviewing the discussion guides. Marketers and often ad agencies are typically present for the presentation of findings.*

*In terms of industries, my most extensive experience is in healthcare. I have most often supported pharmaceutical companies, although I've also done work for hospital systems and health insurers.*

*I have experience working in CPGs (e.g., snacks, adult beverages, cleaning products, nicotine products), agriculture, environmental issues, membership services projects for multinational companies, and a state-based utilities service.*

*From my newspaper days, I have extensive experience in education, agriculture, and local government.*

**Q: More recently, you've embarked on an ontological coaching program. We suspect that that might be a concept unfamiliar to many of our readers, so could you introduce it and help connect it to your work as a research and insights professional?**

*I think of ontological coaching as transformative coaching because it's about helping people see how they observe their worlds – and we do that by engaging people with their emotions, their bodies (we have a body and our body has knowledge!), and their narratives. As we come to recognize how we are observing our world(s) – to stand apart from that observer even as we really feel-into that observer—there is an opportunity to observe our world(s) and situations differently – from a different observational point, one that is embodied. From there, opportunities for action can shift and expand. Transformational ontological coaching is about helping people see new possibilities for how we show up, for what we pursue, for our relationships, our organizations, ourselves.*

**Q: People have a way of remembering stories and anecdotes, so we're going to put you on the spot:**

**Tell us about a time when you were genuinely surprised as a researcher?**

*I was interviewing a woman who developed ALS when her children were young and who were teenagers and young adults at the time of the interview. She had a lot of difficulty speaking by this point. I would frequently have to confirm what she said or, unfortunately, ask her to repeat herself. Her kids were in the background – coming to the fore occasionally to help her drink water, which she could no longer do on her own because she could not move her arms without assistance.*

*As context for where I'm going with this, I've had the understanding that there is a common anecdotal understanding among clinicians and caregivers that people with ALS are exceptionally nice and exceptionally positive. So, I was surprised and grateful that she, ultimately, opened up about the difficulties.*

*She had talked about being grateful that she was still alive and had been able to watch her children grow up. As I continued to ask about her experiences, such as what she liked to do before she had ALS, she admitted that it was “sometimes” difficult to watch the family simply walk out the door to go on hikes, which she used to love to do, leaving her behind. When I asked how often she had that sadness, she said, basically, that it was all the time.*

*It is heartbreaking to me that she had to manage living inside an increasingly immobile body, yet I was grateful she was willing to share that sadness she lived with – that there could be a break in the positivity enough to acknowledge, too, the painful and the difficult. Of course, I recognize that I don't know how that experience was for her. But I*

*was honestly surprised given the anecdotes among clinicians and caregivers and thankful that I was able to create that kind of safe space.*

**Q: It's no secret that our team here at Beyond the Table Research always makes a plug for Pittsburgh, not just a research destination, but in general. You've spent time here at various points of your life – what's your favorite thing about the city?**

*I love the look – like when you're in the city and looking out at the hills climbing up from the rivers, the houses scattered sweetly on the hills. I love all the trees, the green, and the rivers.*

*And they say Pittsburgh is a big-little city – a city with the intellectual and entertainment advantages of a city but still sweet, kind, not cold. That feels on point to me, and I like that.*

*And you know how the music that you liked in your teens and early 20s always stays resonant in deep emotional ways? Pittsburgh is like that for me. Because I arrived there from Johnstown, PA, a kid, 17, just out of high school, and just starting college. I got my undergraduate from the University of Pittsburgh and loved that school and my literature program. So, it just has that deep emotional feeling of coming-alive as you feel when you finish high school and start becoming independent as a young adult.*

Thank you, Pamela, for letting us put you in the “hot seat” and for taking this deep dive with us! We learned a lot today and appreciated the opportunity to bring fresh perspectives to our readers.

## About Us

**Beyond the Table Research**, a premier market research facility in Pittsburgh, is proud to serve as a crossroads where distinguished researchers, carefully vetted respondents, a modern, thoughtfully designed venue, and a hands-on, experienced project management converge to create exceptional insights. To learn more about our capabilities as a resource partner, please visit our website at [btrfocus.com](http://btrfocus.com), or take a [virtual tour of our research facility](#).

**Pamela Batzel** has nearly 20 years' experience in qualitative market research, preceded by an 11-year journalism career. A graduate of Carnegie Mellon University with a Master's in Rhetoric, Pamela leverages study subjects' language-use to uncover their ways of seeing and attitudes. She is also currently enrolled in an ontological coaching program, expanding her skills in

*assessing body language and emotion. To learn more about her services, please visit her website at [finchandthefrog.com](http://finchandthefrog.com)*