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Abstract

Warren and Karner's (2010) second edition of *Discovering Qualitative Methods* provides the novice and/or student sociology researcher with a solid foundation in the historical and theoretical underpinnings of qualitative research as it is applied to the social sciences. Once the reader is grounded in the history and principles of qualitative research the book evolves into a rich, informative, "how-to" guide for those undertaking the complexities of contemporary qualitative research, including fieldwork, qualitative interviews, and collection of visual/textual and internet data.

Keywords

Qualitative Research, Sociology, Field Research, Qualitative Interviewing

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Discovering Qualitative Methods: Field Research,
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by Carol A. B. Warren and Tracy Xavia Karner

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Warren and Karner’s (2010) second edition of Discovering Qualitative Methods provides the novice and/or student sociology researcher with a solid foundation in the historical and theoretical underpinnings of qualitative research as it is applied to the social sciences. Once the reader is grounded in the history and principles of qualitative research the book evolves into a rich, informative, “how-to” guide for those undertaking the complexities of contemporary qualitative research, including fieldwork, qualitative interviews, and collection of visual/textual and internet data. Key Words: Qualitative Research, Sociology, Field Research, Qualitative Interviewing

Warren and Karner (2010) state that, “For many scholars, qualitative research is a kind of personal passion: the satisfaction of a boundless curiosity about the construction of our society” (p. 14). It is made clear to the reader from the first chapter of *Discovering Qualitative Methods* that both Warren and Karner possess this “personal passion” for qualitative research and are invested in maintaining the integrity and utility of qualitative research through the dedicated teaching of their students. Their work is comprehensive and detailed to the most nuanced of steps, leaving no stone unturned in ensuring the novice researcher is equipped with the necessary tools to conduct his/her research in an ethical and scientifically rigorous manner.

Warren and Karner’s (2010) second edition of *Discovering Qualitative Methods* provides the novice and/or student sociology researcher with a solid foundation in the historical and theoretical underpinnings of qualitative research as it is applied to the social sciences. Once the reader is grounded in the history and principles of qualitative research the book evolves into a rich, informative, “how-to” guide for those undertaking the complexities of contemporary qualitative research, including fieldwork, qualitative interviews, and collection of visual/textual and internet data.

In the introductory chapter, Warren and Karner (2010) delineate the basic similarities and differences between quantitative and qualitative research, including epistemology, using a concise and systematic approach, allowing the student to grasp the fundamental concepts before delving into the intricacies of qualitative data collection and analysis. The basic tenets of positivism and constructivism are introduced and fundamental concerns associated with generalizability, validity and reliability in qualitative research are briefly, yet adequately, addressed through a seemingly objective lens. The history of qualitative inquiry and analysis from a sociological perspective is also provided in a chronologically organized fashion, with emphasis on the “Chicago

School” as responsible for “several key features of contemporary qualitative methods, including the use of documents, fieldwork, and interviewing” (p. 12). The early twentieth-century “Chicago School” is referenced throughout to neatly tie current methodological practices to historical underpinnings in sociological qualitative research.

Once the reader is grounded in the history, epistemology, and basic principles of qualitative research, the authors explore the ethical and legal implications of conducting research, as well as the importance of oversight committees and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process. Not only is the IRB process presented in an easy to grasp, sequential format, but common difficulties encountered through the IRB process are also acknowledged, including the potential to need IRB approval from several institutions when conducting research in the field. Additionally, the authors address such topics as “protection from harm” in a way that informs the reader of important but often overlooked nuances of confidentiality (i.e., confidentiality not only involves removing participant names, but also includes the removal of detailed information which may allow others to identify the participant). This informative chapter encompasses the meaning of protection from harm and provides information regarding specific IRB regulations, yet also goes one step further to discuss why the IRB is necessary as it relates to the historical origins of oversight committees and strictly enforced regulations in research (i.e., Nuremberg trials and Tuskegee Syphilis Study).

Once the authors delve into the specifics of data collection and analysis (i.e., fieldwork, interviews, and textual/visual data) from a sociological perspective, the text becomes a pragmatic and useful guide for qualitative researchers from all disciplines. Warren and Karner (2010) present the information so that it reads as a manual for fieldwork, providing rich detail for each step in the process, from selecting a setting, importance of personal presentation, embodiment, demeanor, approaching the setting, and gaining *entrée*. Without overwhelming the reader, Warren and Karner thoughtfully and competently address the nuances of fieldwork and practical applications, such as membership roles (i.e., whether to enter as a member or non-member of a selected group) and how this may impact observations (i.e., taking so much for granted in a setting that the fieldnotes result in thin descriptions). Additionally, the authors address the issue of emotional response in conducting qualitative research. Given the experience-near nature of qualitative research, the authors normalize emotional response in the field, “As people with feelings and responses, fieldworkers are never passive observers no matter how unobtrusive they attempt to be” (p. 101).

It is clear to the reader that Warren and Karner (2010) stay true to the introductory nature of their work and to their intended audience, the student. They consistently keep the student in mind, reiterating several times throughout the book that the student is a representative of his/her university or institution and should conduct himself/herself as such. The authors utilize not only their own experiences, but also the experiences of their students as examples to highlight the “dos and don’ts” including consequences of mistakes in fieldwork or interviewing. (i.e., student who disclosed too much personal information during the interview influenced her respondent). For the benefit of the novice, Warren and Karner provide useful documentation examples throughout (i.e., sample IRB approved consent form, examples of “thickly” versus “thinly” descriptive fieldnotes, sample interview guide, interview preparation checklist, etc.). Additionally, they also incorporate pragmatic advice regarding safety in the field. Specific examples

include, giving respondents rides in cars, paying attention to the potential for danger as you would in everyday life, women viewed as sexual objects, and awareness of the potential for becoming a victim of violence.

Warren and Karner's (2010) work is organized and both easy to read and reference. The content of the text is beautifully laid out in the opening paragraph of each chapter. The organization and flow of the book is exceptional; however, one drawback from a student's perspective is that at many times throughout the book, the authors will draw on previous points and go back to previously used examples to augment the material. This can be confusing for the reader who is not reading from beginning to end but rather, using the text to reference a particular section. Despite this, while aimed at the student researcher, the book provides up-to-date information regarding new technologies (i.e., transcription software, analytic technologies, etc.) and issues surrounding internet data collection, which is useful for the seasoned researcher as well the novice. When addressing internet-based interviewing procedures and concerns, Warren and Karner caution the student researcher against undertaking such interviewing practices since IRB and ethical issues can cause complications he/she may not be prepared for.

Discovering Qualitative Methods concludes with a chapter on "Writing Well" in which the authors provide the reader with specifics on the organization and components of the qualitative research report. In addition, Warren and Karner (2010) also share their own individual writing process. This process includes such essential, yet often overlooked components as having adequate space to sort your data, working in a comfortable and aesthetically pleasing environment, and allowing adequate time to analyze your data and compose your report.

Generally, Warren and Karner (2010) keep it both simple and practical (i.e., "if you are interested in behavior and interactions, use the ethnographic method; if you are interested in biography and accounts, use the interview method; if you are interested in both, use both methods") (p. 129). *Discovering Qualitative Methods* is a great "how-to" guide for conducting qualitative research, whether conducting ethnographic studies in the field or intending to prepare and conduct qualitative interviews. Warren and Karner use their expertise, resulting from a lifetime of experience in qualitative research, to compose a thoughtful and comprehensive body of work aimed at assisting their most valued consumer, the student.

Textual Features and Extras

To enhance learning of the material, Warren and Karner's (2010) book includes an accompanying online Instructor's Manual and Powerpoint lecture slides. The book also provides useful internet resources (i.e., Internet Research Ethics Clearinghouse <http://www.uwm.edu/Dept/SOIS/cipr/irec.html>). In addition, Warren and Karner share useful documentation examples throughout the book to assist the student (i.e., sample IRB approved consent form, examples of "thickly" versus "thinly" descriptive fieldnotes, sample interview guide, interview preparation checklist, etc.). From both a student and teacher's perspective, I found these examples to be both relevant and useful.

The book's web page can be found at Oxford University Press: Higher Education <http://www.oup.com/us/catalog/he/subject/Sociology/Majors/QualitativeResearchMethods/?view=usa&ci=9780195330380>. For more information on author Carol A. B. Warren,

visit <http://www.sociology.ku.edu/people/warren/>. For more information on author Tracy Xavia Karner, visit http://www.class.uh.edu/sociology/facultyandstaff_txkarner.asp

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Author Note

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