

12-13-2018

Organizing the Three Forms of Qualitative Inquiry: A Book Review of Qualitative Inquiry – Thematic, Narrative and Arts-Based Perspectives

Umair Majid

University of Toronto, umair.majid@mail.utoronto.ca

Follow this and additional works at: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr>



Part of the [Quantitative, Qualitative, Comparative, and Historical Methodologies Commons](#), and the [Social Statistics Commons](#)

Recommended APA Citation

Majid, U. (2018). Organizing the Three Forms of Qualitative Inquiry: A Book Review of Qualitative Inquiry – Thematic, Narrative and Arts-Based Perspectives. *The Qualitative Report*, 23(12), 3031-3035.
<https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2018.3895>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the The Qualitative Report at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Qualitative Report by an authorized administrator of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact nsuworks@nova.edu.



Qualitative Research Graduate Certificate
Indulge in Culture
Exclusively Online • 18 Credits
LEARN MORE

NSU
NOVA SOUTHEASTERN
UNIVERSITY

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN

Organizing the Three Forms of Qualitative Inquiry: A Book Review of Qualitative Inquiry – Thematic, Narrative and Arts-Based Perspectives

Abstract

In this book review, I examine the structure, form, content, and purpose of *Qualitative Inquiry: Thematic, Narrative and Arts-Based Perspectives* by Lynn Butler-Kisber. This book aims to augment the teaching and learning of investigators engaging in qualitative inquiry. First, I explicate my positionality and reflexivity to contextualize the approach of this book review. Following this discussion, I analyze the book's structure and content by comparing the alignment between the background, exemplars, and strategies with the intended purpose of the book. I conclude this book review with a summary of its benefits to novice investigators.

Keywords

Qualitative Research, Thematic Analysis, Narrative Inquiry, Arts-Based Research, Book Review

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

Organizing the Three Forms of Qualitative Inquiry: A Book Review of *Qualitative Inquiry—Thematic, Narrative and Arts-Based Perspectives*

Umair Majid

University of Toronto, Ontario, Canada

*In this book review, I examine the structure, form, content, and purpose of *Qualitative Inquiry: Thematic, Narrative and Arts-Based Perspectives* by Lynn Butler-Kisber. This book aims to augment the teaching and learning of investigators engaging in qualitative inquiry. First, I explicate my positionality and reflexivity to contextualize the approach of this book review. Following this discussion, I analyze the book's structure and content by comparing the alignment between the background, exemplars, and strategies with the intended purpose of the book. I conclude this book review with a summary of its benefits to novice investigators. Keywords: *Qualitative Research, Thematic Analysis, Narrative Inquiry, Arts-Based Research, Book Review**

Body of Review

Introduction to the Book

Novice and experienced investigators regularly encounter challenges in learning, applying, and rationalizing their approaches to qualitative inquiry. For achieving these objectives, there are a myriad of resources and tools available online. However, despite the availability of resources and tools, the majority I believe are inaccessible to novice investigators.

Two years after my exposure to qualitative inquiry, I still face the reality that there are only a handful of articles, books, tools, and resources that are comprehensible and accessible to the neophyte. The majority of methodological literature focuses on the philosophical, conceptual, and theoretical foundations of qualitative inquiry, which are important topics but not the primary focus for new investigators. Rather, these investigators require tangible and bite-sized resources that allow them to comprehend the foundations of qualitative inquiry in a time sensitive manner. This scenario makes it imperative to work towards cultivating and orienting the next generation of qualitative inquirers, myself included. In my own practice, I have attempted to address these gaps by publishing resources and guides and facilitating workshops to mentor novice investigators in qualitative inquiry, protocol development, and quality appraisal (Jameel & Majid 2018; Jameel, Shaheen, & Majid, 2018; Majid, 2017, 2018a; Majid & Vanstone, 2018).

Butler-Kisber's (2018) book titled *Qualitative Inquiry: Thematic, Narrative and Arts-Based Perspectives* offers another source of respite for investigators looking for accessible resources to conduct qualitative research. In the introductory preamble, Butler-Kisber (2018) immediately identifies the audience and motivation of the book. This distinction is helpful for me as a book reviewer and learner of qualitative research because it contextualizes the structure, purpose, content, and implications for researchers and learners of research. As a Professor of Education, Butler-Kisber uses this book to address the experiences of students who commonly struggle to grasp, comprehend, and practice qualitative inquiry. Not only students, but also professors and seasoned investigators are increasingly engaging in diverse

forms of qualitative inquiry and desire methodological resources that are accessible to them and appropriate to their research context.

Butler-Kisber (2018) emphasizes the purpose of this book as not only to delineate the different forms (or methodologies) of qualitative inquiry but to identify the slurring, muddling, and overlap between them. This orientation is helpful because it allows new investigators to gain an appreciation of the ambiguity, creativity, and fickleness inherent in qualitative inquiry. As a result, the author focuses on both “traditional” (thematic and narrative) and “innovative” (arts-based) forms of qualitative inquiry. This categorization may be helpful for investigators who are just beginning to operationalize qualitative inquiry in their research practice.

In this book review, I will first position myself in the amalgamation of my experiences using qualitative inquiry by describing the evolution of qualitative inquiry in my research practice and its application in the health sciences discipline. Following this discussion, I will delve into the nuances and particularities of the structure, form, content, and purpose of the book that reflects my reading, rereading, reflexivity, and reflection. I conclude this review by summarizing the book’s key benefits for novice and experienced investigators (Appendix A).

Explicating my Positionality

I completed my Master of Science in Health Research Methodology. Approximately half of my training was focused on quantitative and experimental methods in health science research, and the other half emphasized qualitative and mixed-methods approaches. In my courses, thematic analysis appeared to be the most common approach to qualitative inquiry. There was some discussion on narrative and arts-based approaches, but the discussion was minimal at best and certainly not the primary focus. My thesis examined the structure, design, content, and application of high-utility quality appraisal tools for use in qualitative evidence syntheses (Majid & Vanstone, 2018). This publication offers investigators and decision-makers guidance on choosing an appraisal tool that is appropriate for their scholarly purpose.

With regards narrative inquiry, I have few experiences apart from a previous book review on life writing methods (Majid, 2018b). I also have a Master of Education where several courses require me to analyze stories and narratives. Despite my limited understanding, I hoped through reading this book that I would be able to expand my understanding of narrative inquiry and conceptualize how I can leverage this form of inquiry in my own research practice.

Also, I was mostly unfamiliar with arts-based inquiry. I have encountered some examples of innovative data collection techniques such as body mapping and photovoice (Jager, Tewson, Ludlow, & Boydell, 2016; Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2010). Notwithstanding, I felt an extreme level of excitement to delve into a unique and innovative form of qualitative inquiry by reading this book. This excitement, in particular, stemmed from a need to delineate how arts-based inquiry may be expanded in the field of health sciences.

Before I started reading the book, I determined that my goal of this book review was to deepen and broaden my personal understanding of different forms of qualitative inquiry and analysis. Specifically, as I have just started my PhD program, I hoped that this book improves my ability to elaborate on key issues with the qualitative methodological approaches that will guide my PhD dissertation. A secondary purpose was to augment my teaching and learning practice, which regularly supports novice investigators to increase their capacity to conduct high-quality qualitative research.

Structure and Format

Having read over ten books and many more journal articles and book chapters on qualitative research, I feel that there is an increasing need to make teaching and learning of

qualitative inquiry more accessible to novice investigators. Butler-Kisber's (2018) book *Qualitative Inquiry: Thematic, Narrative, and Arts-Based Perspectives* departs from my previous learning because of the compelling structure it uses and the discussions it facilitates on three forms of qualitative inquiry (thematic, narrative, and arts-based). The book is divided into five parts and a number of chapters associated with each:

1. **Qualitative Inquiry:** (a) Introduction to Qualitative Inquiry and (b) Getting Started in Qualitative Inquiry.
2. **Thematic Perspectives:** (a) Constant Comparison Inquiry and (b) Phenomenological Inquiry.
3. **Narrative Perspectives:** (a) Narrative Inquiry.
4. **Arts-Based Perspectives:** (a) Poetic Inquiry, (b) Visual Inquiry (Collage Inquiry, Photo/Film Inquiry, Visual Narratives), and (c) Performative Inquiry (Ethnodrama and Reader's Theatre, Music, and Dance).
5. **Future Directions:** (a) Concluding Thoughts

Aligned with the author's purpose to augment the need for novice and experienced investigators to conceptualize and employ different forms of qualitative inquiry, the author illustrates both the challenges and strategies to address them through enticing exemplars. For example, in the discussion on Ethnodrama, the author provides an exemplar script that illustrates how an investigator has practiced this form of inquiry. This script includes a powerful prologue that situates the purposes and rationale for using ethnodrama, a captivating excerpt of the actual script that describes a conversation between a burglary victim and the burglar, and a convincing epilogue that orients the reader to reflections and specific analytic processes (Butler-Kisber, 2018, pp. 159-161).

Most of discussion pertains to texts and excerpts reproduced from other sources that have been repurposed to serve an educational, and in some cases emotive, objective. These texts and excerpts provide powerful exemplars of the analytic processes, procedures, and devices that researchers can integrate in their own work. These examples are especially powerful because they are multidisciplinary (education, health sciences, and social sciences). As someone who became despised of the arts due to negative experiences in elementary education, this book sparked a newfound appreciation and respect for the arts and its applications in research.

What is more profound about this book is that the author does not delve into these enthralling examples immediately; rather, the author scaffolds the practice of qualitative inquiry with the persuasive interpretations of the historical and theoretical context. In this way, readers are able to better appreciate the practical suggestions provided to guide their own research practice. This scaffolding also equips researchers with the historical and theoretical tools to justify their specific approach to qualitative inquiry.

The author shows a remarkable level of literary flexibility by employing metaphors to supplement thoughts, suggestions, and strategies. The metaphors complement and substantiate the powerful exemplars. For example, following an example of how constant comparison inquiry has been applied in a research study, the author describes that this form of inquiry can be analogized as:

creating folders (manually or electronically) with the code name and the rule of inclusion on the front. Chunks are separated and put in the folder according to the rule of inclusion...If a particular unit of text does not fit, then it is necessary to change the rule to make it fit, or to create another category and write a rule of inclusion for it. (Butler-Kisber, 2018, pp. 50)

Analogies such as this one are pertinent and convincing because they evolve readers' operationalization of how different forms of qualitative inquiry, analytical devices, and procedures can be applied in their own practice.

As I concluded the book, I had an inkling regarding the attention given to different forms of inquiry. I realized that if we consider thematic and narrative inquiry as more "conventional" and widely utilized by researchers in a variety of disciplines, and arts-based inquiry as less "conventional" and more innovative, it appears that arts-based inquiry was given the majority of attention in this book (56 pages to thematic and narrative inquiry, whereas 74 pages to arts-based inquiry). It is possible that an ulterior motive of the author was to leverage conventional forms of inquiry, which many qualitative researchers are familiar with to some degree, to advance the understanding, use, and deployment of unique, uncommon, and innovative approaches to qualitative inquiry.

Final Thoughts

In this book review on *Qualitative Inquiry: Thematic, Narrative and Arts-Based Perspectives* (Butler-Kisber, 2018), I used my previous experiences and learning to determine how the book may expand my knowledge, skills, and experiences of qualitative inquiry in the health sciences. I described my reactions and preconceptions and examined the nuances of the book's structure, form, and content—including the powerful use of exemplars, metaphors, analogies, and historical/theoretical foundations of qualitative inquiry. I believe that this book serves as an excellent launchpad for novice investigators to familiarize themselves with different forms of qualitative inquiry, both conventional and innovative. However, as I conclude this review, I am in need of additional resources, tools, and readings to continue my learning of arts-based inquiry. Perhaps this emerging need stems from a motivation that Butler-Kisber's book has instilled in me about the possibilities that exist in the use of arts-based inquiry.

References

- Butler-Kisber, L. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry: Thematic, narrative and arts-based perspectives*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Jager, A. D., Tewson, A., Ludlow, B., & Boydell, K. (2016). Embodied ways of storying the self: A systematic review of body-mapping. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 17(2).
- Jameel, B., & Majid, U. (2018). Research fundamentals: Data collection, data analysis, and ethics. *URNCST Journal*, 2(4), 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.26685/urncst.39>
- Jameel, B., Shaheen, S., & Majid, U. (2018). Introduction to qualitative research for novice investigators. *URNCST Journal*, 2(6), 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.26685/urncst.57>
- Majid, U. (2017). Research fundamentals: The research question, objectives and background. *URNCST Journal*, 1(2), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.26685/urncst.14>
- Majid, U. (2018a). Research fundamentals: Study design, population, and sample size. *URNCST Journal*, 2(1), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.26685/urncst.16>
- Majid, U. (2018b). The functionality and usability of critical approaches to life writing methods in qualitative research: A book review. *The Qualitative Report*, 23(8), 1948-1951. Retrieved from <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol23/iss8/11/>
- Majid, U., & Vanstone, M. (2018). Appraising qualitative research for evidence syntheses: A compendium of quality appraisal tools. *Qualitative Health Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1049732318785358>
- Onwuegbuzie, A. J., Leech, N. L., & Collins, K. M. (2010). Innovative data collection

strategies in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, 15(3), 696-726. Retrieved from <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol15/iss3/12>

Appendix A: Summary of Benefits

- The emphasis is not just on delineating the different forms of qualitative inquiry but also the overlap between them.
- Describes all forms of inquiry from historical, theoretical, and practical lenses.
- Not only describes conventional and traditional forms of inquiry (thematic and narrative), but also emerging and innovative forms (arts-based).
- Provides detailed exemplars that substantiate analytic processes and strategies. These exemplars are multidisciplinary and provide a strong foundation for investigators to employ different forms of qualitative inquiry in their practice.
- The division (thematic, narrative, and arts-based) support novice investigators by constructing a typology that illustrates the similarities and differences between methodological approaches.

Author Note

I completed my MSc in health research methodology at McMaster University where I investigated the quality appraisal process of qualitative research. Currently at McMaster, I have appointments as a Curriculum Designer, Program Developer, and Instructor, teaching and designing courses on epidemiology, the Canadian health care system, and pathophysiology. I also have diverse experiences, knowledge and expertise in qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods research, which I use to provide qualitative evidence to agencies investigating technologies to include under the provincial or national funding mandate. I also have a MEd from Queen's University where I examined innovative and effective ways to design and evaluate curricula. Currently, I am a PhD student in Health Services Organization and Management Studies at the Institute of Health Policy, Management, and Evaluation at University of Toronto. For my PhD dissertation, I am investigating how to transform tokenism in patient engagement to partnership in hospital planning activities. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: umair.majid@mail.utoronto.ca.

Copyright 2018: Umair Majid and Nova Southeastern University.

Article Citation

Majid, U. (2018). Organizing the three forms of qualitative inquiry: A book review of *Qualitative Inquiry – Thematic, Narrative and Arts-Based Perspectives*. *The Qualitative Report*, 23(12), 3031-3035. Retrieved from <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol23/iss12/11>
