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A Lighthouse in the Sea of Qualitative Textbooks: A Book Review of Kakali Bhattacharya's Fundamentals of Qualitative Research—A Practical Guide

Joshua L. Adams
Liberty University, jladams5@liberty.edu

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Abstract

Kakali Bhattacharya (2017) effortlessly advances the pedagogical literature on qualitative research. As a scholar-practitioner of the field of criminal justice, a recent doctoral graduate, and a qualitative methodologist, reading this book allowed me to reflect on my strengths and weaknesses in conducting qualitative inquiry. This review presents the primary intent of the book, which is to be a supplemental text for an introductory qualitative research methods course. Bhattacharya (2017) offers a succinct and straightforward recipe to improve one's understanding of qualitative research methods, as well as provides best practices while doing so. This book is the perfect roadmap for the instructor who is asked to facilitate his or her first qualitative research methods course to follow or for a student to supplement their course text.

Keywords

Qualitative Research Methods, Critical Race Theory, Positivism, Book Review, Course Development

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A Lighthouse in the Sea of Qualitative Textbooks: A Book Review of Kakali Bhattacharya's *Fundamentals of Qualitative Research—A Practical Guide*

Joshua L. Adams

Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia, USA

Kakali Bhattacharya (2017) effortlessly advances the pedagogical literature on qualitative research. As a scholar-practitioner of the field of criminal justice, a recent doctoral graduate, and a qualitative methodologist, reading this book allowed me to reflect on my strengths and weaknesses in conducting qualitative inquiry. This review presents the primary intent of the book, which is to be a supplemental text for an introductory qualitative research methods course. Bhattacharya (2017) offers a succinct and straightforward recipe to improve one's understanding of qualitative research methods, as well as provides best practices while doing so. This book is the perfect roadmap for the instructor who is asked to facilitate his or her first qualitative research methods course to follow or for a student to supplement their course text. Keywords: Qualitative Research Methods, Critical Race Theory, Positivism, Book Review, Course Development

Dr. Bhattacharya composed this text to assist both the student and instructor in exploring the nature of qualitative research. It is meant to be a supplementary text for an introductory research methods course; however, I posit it could be a stand-alone text for an introductory qualitative research methods course if supplementary material were provided to students. While reading this book, I reflected on my own lived experiences of taking my first qualitative research methods course, and it aligned with my ontological views almost immediately. I was overwhelmed by the new terminology used, contrary to the quantitative research courses I had taken prior. If I had read this book before my first qualitative research methods class, I believe I would have been able to grasp qualitative research paradigms of inquiry sooner. This book was a culmination and combination of best practices Dr. Bhattacharya collected over her many years of conducting and instructing introductory and advanced qualitative research methods courses. There are creative and interactive exercises at the end of each unit (chapter) that reinforce the main learning points the layperson or the advanced researcher can complete. My positionality is that of a recent doctoral graduate, within the past year, as well as an instructor and scholar-practitioner in the field of criminal justice.

Bhattacharya (2017) provides a simple, yet practical, definition of the objectivist and constructivist ways of thinking, as well as definitions for epistemology and ontology. Before reading this text, I found other author's definitions and explanations of epistemology and ontology very vague and non-synthesized. Conversely, reading this text and doing the interactive exercises has led me to develop an increased understanding and more profound comprehension of such concepts that are critical to conducting a rigorous qualitative study. This text delves into the terrain of qualitative research and introduces the purposes of qualitative research: understand, interrogate, and deconstruct. Also, Dr. Bhattacharya synthesizes and illustrates the need for proper alignment of the purpose statement, problem statement, research question(s), and theoretical lens of a rigorous study. The interactive exercises at the end of Unit 3 can potentially help an instructor quickly identify a lack in a student's understanding of alignment, which can save a student from making a detrimental

mistake in his or her thesis, dissertation or any other rigorous assignment. While preparing manuscripts for peer-review publication, I frequently compare my proposed statement of purpose and research question(s) with the examples provided in Bhattacharya (2017) and found this very helpful in identifying any alignment issues. This “alignment check” is possible because the book contains examples of common qualitative methodological approaches used in the current literature such as: phenomenological inquiry, grounded theory, case study, ethnography, and autoethnography. Other qualitative research methods textbooks do not provide such examples, nor do they allow you as the reader the ability to conduct a check of your comprehension of the key points the author is trying to convey.

Unit 3 further discussed subjectivities and the role they have in a qualitative study. She provides a definition of subjectivity that is easy to understand. Bhattacharya (2017) stated that as a student, one might have the subject positions of being a daughter, a son, a student, a sister, or a career woman, and described these positions as “labels” (p. 35) or subject positions. What I think is critically important in this unit is Dr. Bhattacharya’s breakdown of the general structure of a qualitative dissertation. This breakdown would be beneficial for any doctoral student who has a purpose statement and research question(s) that would best be answered utilizing a qualitative methodology. Again, examples of aligned purpose statements and research questions were provided for quick reference.

Units 4 and 5 introduce the key theoretical perspectives of positivism and postpositivism, as well as how to choose and work within common theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches utilized in qualitative inquiry. One of the scariest tasks for novice qualitative researchers is conducting interviews of research participants. Research participants put their trust in an interviewer that what is discussed during the interview will be treated as confidential information, and their lived experiences will be accurately reflected in the study. Interviewing can cause depression and anxiety for even some experienced researchers. I thoroughly enjoyed Dr. Bhattacharya’s tips and strategies for conducting interviews. What particularly resonated with me was her advice of being comfortable with silence during an interview. Frequently, researchers panic when there is an awkward silence during an interview because our epistemologies inform us that this should not be happening. After reading this text, I found myself introduced to the concept of re-presentation. Dr. Bhattacharya defends the use of this terminology by stating that a researcher can never genuinely represent someone in his or her purest form, to which I agree.

In summary, this book is the perfect roadmap for the instructor who is asked to facilitate his or her first qualitative research methods course or a student to supplement their course text. As a scholar of color, who primarily utilizes qualitative methodologies, this text was food for my soul—as there are not a lot of pedagogical texts in qualitative research authored by other scholars of color. Whenever I am asked by a student or a colleague for a recommendation of a book that can “explain qualitative research to a layperson,” I am going to recommend this book. Upon reflection, this book read more like a question and answer session where I asked a respected professional in the field for the best advice they could give a novice qualitative researcher; this text was the result of the conversation. Any curious qualitative researcher will find this book practical and applicable.

Reference

Bhattacharya, K. (2017). *Fundamentals of qualitative research: A practical guide*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Author Note

The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of Liberty University. My review of this text was wholly independent and voluntary. I was not contacted by the author of the text nor the publisher. On the contrary, I felt a sense of responsibility to provide this review after reading this book for professional development. I am a 16-year scholar-practitioner in the field of criminal justice and currently an adjunct professor for Liberty University, located in Lynchburg, VA, where I teach graduate and undergraduate level criminal justice and homeland security courses. I have diverse experiences, knowledge, and expertise from the qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods research traditions. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: jladams5@liberty.edu.

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