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Peeling Off the Layers in Qualitative Research: A Book Review of Robert K. Yin's Qualitative Research from Start to Finish

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Abstract

The title of Robert Yin's (2016) book, *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*, second edition, aptly summarizes what he intended to accomplish and did. The author's writing and organizational style made for an enjoyable and engaging read given the subject matter. For the student, teacher, or researcher seeking an in-depth understanding of the entire research process, this book covers it all, including an exhaustive reference list on qualitative studies in varied disciplines. In keeping with his training as a social scientist, Yin incorporated his global research experience and understanding of human behavior to produce a book with something to offer researchers at various levels. I integrated my perspective as a doctorate student with intermediate experience in qualitative and quantitative research, highlighting what I found most useful.

Keywords

Analytical Generalization, Data Exclusion, Researcher Bias

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Peeling Off the Layers in Qualitative Research: A Book Review of Robert K. Yin's *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*

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*The title of Robert Yin's (2016) book, *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*, second edition, aptly summarizes what he intended to accomplish and did. The author's writing and organizational style made for an enjoyable and engaging read given the subject matter. For the student, teacher, or researcher seeking an in-depth understanding of the entire research process, this book covers it all, including an exhaustive reference list on qualitative studies in varied disciplines. In keeping with his training as a social scientist, Yin incorporated his global research experience and understanding of human behavior to produce a book with something to offer researchers at various levels. I integrated my perspective as a doctorate student with intermediate experience in qualitative and quantitative research, highlighting what I found most useful. Keywords: Analytical Generalization, Data Exclusion, Researcher Bias*

I chose the theme *peeling off the layers in qualitative research* for this review because it uncovered elements of qualitative research that I had not read previously or thought of until reading this book. I discovered Yin's (2016) book, *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish* while searching for a book on qualitative research that could walk me through the entire process, in preparation for a qualitative research class project. I was drawn to Yin's (2016) book for several reasons discussed throughout the review. The author maintained the main themes from his first edition—to provide a practical, inductive, and adaptive text for those interested in doing, teaching, or learning (Yin, 2016). This included his deliberate organization of the book into 12 chapters for instructors, with additional semester or year-long projects at the back of the book for enthusiastic learners. I had encountered the organizational format of brief introductions, preview boxes, and recaps in other books; however, I found it more effective in this text, possibly due to the author's writing style. The format prepared the reader for what was to come (brief introduction), what to learn (preview box), and what was covered (recap), which was one of the most appealing aspects because it also saved time when jumping to different sections. I figured this would be a major benefit for busy professionals trying to learn and produce under deadlines. Unlike other research books I've read that define and describe the types of qualitative research, Yin's first chapter was dedicated to explaining what qualitative research was, to help ensure that readers grasped the concept before taking on the "doing" of qualitative research.

In her review of the first edition of this book, Rademaker (2011) expressed that it was not for those seeking a linear, prescriptive guide. In keeping with his non-prescriptive approach, Yin furnished researchers with the freedom to choose material based on their needs. In his explanation of differences between the first edition and second edition, Yin presented more detail about certain topics, incorporating feedback from the first edition to enhance this edition's usefulness. Enhancements included differences in worldviews and methodological preferences; going beyond generalized qualitative research to specialized; trustworthiness and validity, generalizability and transferability; ways to transition effectively during data analysis; mixed methods research; and research as a craft. Everything I needed and did not know I would

need (in relation to my project) I found in this text. Each chapter offered new information, as well as valuable tips and resources. I wrote notes, highlighted text, used post-its, and looked up studies of interest to me. Because this book offers so much more than one would expect, I believe both beginners and experts would gain significantly from it.

An excellent tip for beginners given in the book was the creation of a study bank, which was also the exercise for chapter 3, *How to Start a Qualitative Research Study*. Yin's discussions about persevering in chapter 2 and developing workable relationships in chapter 5 helped me to understand and appreciate my work from a qualitative researcher's perspective. My work involves seeing clients in their homes, for individual, couples, or family therapy, which means you are "entering their space and time and social relationships" (Yin, 2016, p. 117) and may have to face some difficult situations. Similarly, doing fieldwork for a study "requires establishing and maintaining genuine relationships with other people and being able to converse comfortably with them" (Yin, 2016, p. 117). This is one example of doing qualitative research in family therapy. For those contemplating how and where to start, my example above could be meaningful for you. For researchers interested in studies from other professions, the author provided an expansive list of qualitative studies with full citations. Additionally, the reference section listed the first and last names of the authors, which, in my view, was another time-saving task for the reader when looking up authors. Some of the exercises I found most beneficial were in chapters 8 and 9, learning how to code and find patterns, and in chapter 10, creating two different slide presentations, one with nonverbal objects and the other with words only. The author felt it was necessary to integrate the presentation issue as a complete chapter, *Displaying Qualitative Data*, due to the lack of attention given to this issue matter. For advanced researchers, the above exercises may seem simplistic; in my case, it was helpful to practice using non-narrative formats for qualitative research and any other presentations I would give down the road.

Going back to the appeal of Yin's writing technique, I thought it best to quote Rademaker in her 2011 review of edition one: "I believe that a clear writing style is the most significant factor in connecting with a reader, and indeed, I connected with Yin's work as a researcher and a teacher" (p. 1428). His explanation of researcher bias, unexpected bias, and the issue of generalizability strengthened my understanding of these qualitative research challenges and inspired me to continue examining them beyond this book. When researchers perform *data exclusion*, the act of omitting data for a variety of reasons such as uncooperative subjects, procedural issues, or contrary results, they may do so without realizing the potential ethical consequences. Yin (2016) discussed the possibility of unknown biases occurring in the reassembling phase of data analysis, which could be minimized by implementing *constant comparisons*, *rival thinking*, and paying attention to *negative instances*. While most researchers are familiar with generalizability, Yin took it a step further by explaining how qualitative researchers could generalize their results analytically through a two-step process: demonstrating how their findings could inform certain concepts, theoretical constructs, or hypothesized order of events; then applying the same concepts, constructs, and hypothesized events to comparable situations. The purpose of *analytic generalization* is to reveal how patterns in one study could apply to other studies (Yin, 2016). The author presents several vignettes to demonstrate the applicability of generalization in numerous studies.

Yin (2016) used the words "wondering" and "wandering" in his discussion of the reassembling phase of data analysis. The words are a perfect way to end this book review; for those who have found themselves wondering and wandering when thinking about or attempting to work on a research project, I highly recommend this book to get you on track. Many doctorate students (myself included) can relate to these roaming experiences, especially in the dissertation phase. If you were seeking a book to improve your qualitative study or figure out how to begin one, Yin's "book has presented its ideas in as practical a manner as possible,

enabling you to enter the process incrementally” (2016, p. 312). My hope is that the review gave readers an idea of what to expect, keeping in mind that there are many more layers I did not cover. For additional information about the book, please visit <https://www.amazon.com/Qualitative-Research-Start-Finish-Second/dp/1462517978>

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