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Abstract

In his book, *Philosophies of Qualitative Research*, Svend Brinkmann argues why qualitative researchers need to be mindful of the philosophies that undergird various qualitative research approaches.

Keywords

Philosophy, Qualitative Research, Philosophy Informed Research

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Appreciating Deep Interlinkages: A Review of Svend Brinkmann's *Philosophies of Qualitative Research*

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*In his book, *Philosophies of Qualitative Research*, Svend Brinkmann argues why qualitative researchers need to be mindful of the philosophies that undergird various qualitative research approaches. Keywords: Philosophy, Qualitative Research, Philosophy Informed Research*

For some time now, a level of disquiet has been voiced by some qualitative researchers and qualitative methodologists that the field is inundated with books that focus on the application of qualitative methodologies/methods and that many researchers working in the various qualitative traditions are not acquainted with the various philosophical traditions that guide various methodologies. A line of argument is also seen that speculates that this state of affairs might be because of how qualitative research itself is taught where the focus is teaching just methodologies without any concern to the philosophies that undergird it.

Given this background, *Philosophies of Qualitative Research* is a welcome breath of fresh air. In this book, Brinkmann discusses “the different philosophical paradigms and ideas that influence qualitative research (and)...takes a historical perspective... (to show) ... how the philosophical ideas have evolved and influenced qualitative research in previous times and today” (p. vii). The book’s main aim is to make qualitative researchers appreciate that philosophical ideas and arguments are always “implicit in the design, methods, results and discussion sections” (p. 162) and researchers ignoring this will do so at their own peril.

The book has eight chapters. Chapter 1 provides some background definitions of philosophy and qualitative research and introduces some philosophical themes relevant to qualitative research. The chapter also has some discussion on ontology, epistemology, realism, and anti-realism. Further, Brinkmann, by borrowing on concepts developed by earlier scholars, argues that the various approaches to qualitative research can be seen as engaging in one of four aims: making the hidden obvious, making the obvious obvious, making the obvious dubious, and making the hidden dubious. He discusses these ideas more at length in Chapters 3 to 6. Chapter 2 discusses some selected history of Western philosophy starting from the times of Greeks to the modern time and postulates that “qualitative research is a child of modernity’s split between the objective and the subjective, quanta and qualia” (p. viii). Chapters 3 to 6 introduce various philosophies in relation to their birthplaces and discussion is held on the historical roots of each of the philosophies and explores how each of the philosophies have influenced qualitative research. Chapter 3 discusses the British tradition of positivism and realism. Chapter 4 discusses the German traditions of phenomenology and hermeneutics which the author argues is involved in making the obvious obvious. Chapter 5 discusses the American tradition of pragmatism which the author claims can be considered, in general, that which makes the hidden dubious. Chapter 6 discusses the French traditions of structuralism and poststructuralism which the author argues make the obvious dubious. Chapter 7 provides “a global perspective to the European and American traditions described in the previous chapters and include feminist, indigenous, and “new philosophies” from throughout the world” (p. viii). Chapter 8 summarizes and compares the different philosophies, and it constructs a matrix that includes all of them. There is also “a brief discussion of how to “choose” a philosophical

position as a qualitative researcher and whether this is a matter of choice at all (or rather a matter of one's basic view of humanity and the knowledge produced by humans)" (p. ix).

Reading the chapters, one comes to some interesting observations. The author does not include a separate chapter addressing the critical and emancipatory turn in social science. He talks of the critical theorists and their aim of making the hidden obvious only briefly in Chapter 2 while discussing the history of philosophical thoughts or in Chapter 3 when talking about realism and critical realism. Another point to note is how the author engages with American pragmatism. Brinkmann argues that pragmatism as a philosophical movement that has had an influence on how qualitative research has been conceived of and practiced in some areas. I have not been privy to this line of argumentation in other qualitative research books.

Of all the chapters, Chapter 7 looks to be relatively undertheorized given the topics the author attempts to cover. Ideally, a book of this nature would have a different chapter on indigenous philosophies. These philosophies come from diverse parts of the world and are very different from each other with the only commonality being that they are not part of the western philosophical world. Thus, confining such a vast field to just a few pages looks to be a bit inadequate. In another curious twist, Brinkmann considers feminism to be a philosophical movement in itself that has influenced research methodologies. While many authors include feminism under emancipatory headings or under poststructuralism among others, Brinkmann discusses feminism on its own. This chapter also provides a brief introduction to what is being labeled as the ontological turn and post-qualitative inquiry. Although not exhaustive in the discussion, the section acts as a succinct primer of these topics and will be of much help for those who are interested in the 'new' and 'post-qualitative' work but find the articulations and argumentations by the primary authors too dense.

Brinkmann shows that he has full mastery of the various issues he considers in the book and looks to be amongst the few authors who have the ability to articulate complex philosophical issues in layperson terms and not get bogged down with language that is difficult to decipher. The style of writing is clear, and all the chapters are well structured keeping the reader engaged with the topics. This book can act as a strong supplement to introductory courses in qualitative research or as an entrée in classes that are trying to read deeply into the philosophies of research. Further, this book will be a wonderful addition to not only novice qualitative researchers but also can act as a quick reference to existing practitioners. The only recommendation that I make is that the author should seriously consider expanding the last chapter and have more examples that will allow the readers to appreciate the deep interlinkages between philosophies and research.

Reference

Brinkmann, S. (2018). *Philosophies of qualitative research*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

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