

7-5-2023

“An all-inclusive, user-friendly resource”: A Review of Taylor, Bogdan, and DeVault’s Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: A Guidebook and Resource (4th Edition)

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Recommended APA Citation

Worku, M., Alemayehu, H., Ashebir, L., & Debela, K. L. (2023). “An all-inclusive, user-friendly resource”: A Review of Taylor, Bogdan, and DeVault’s Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: A Guidebook and Resource (4th Edition). *The Qualitative Report*, 28(7), 1895-1901. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2023.6488>

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“An all-inclusive, user-friendly resource”: A Review of Taylor, Bogdan, and DeVault’s Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: A Guidebook and Resource (4th Edition)

Abstract

We reviewed Taylor, Bogdan, and DeVault’s book entitled, *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: A Guidebook and Resource* (4th ed., 2016), and found to be an all-inclusive guide, user-friendly, and resourceful for qualitative researchers. Its inclusion of selected studies as examples to align them with the narratives of the main body of the study makes its value greater.

Keywords

qualitative, research methodology, book review

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“An all-inclusive, user-friendly resource”: A Review of Taylor, Bogdan, and DeVault’s *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: A Guidebook and Resource* (4th Edition)

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We reviewed Taylor, Bogdan, and DeVault’s book entitled, *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: A Guidebook and Resource* (4th ed., 2016), and found to be an all-inclusive guide, user-friendly, and resourceful for qualitative researchers. Its inclusion of selected studies as examples to align them with the narratives of the main body of the study makes its value greater.

Keywords: qualitative, research methodology, book review

Introduction

The book we reviewed, *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: A Guidebook and Resource*, prepared by Steven J. Taylor, Robert Bogdan, and Marjorie L. DeVault (2016), covers two major parts. Part one, “Among the People: How to conduct qualitative research,” is comprised of six chapters: the introduction to qualitative methods, research design and pre-field work, participant observation, in-depth interviewing, discovering methods, and data analysis in qualitative research. Part two, “Writing qualitative research: Selected Studies,” includes six chapters, the first focused on writing and publishing qualitative studies, and the remaining chapters were the research prepared by each author.

Overall Review of the Book

The first chapter of this book begins by defining methodology and mentioning two major theoretical perspectives: positivism and phenomenological. It also briefly discusses the history of qualitative methods, specifically sociology, which contributes a lot to the development of qualitative methods. The other portion of the chapter describes the characteristics of qualitative research. Here qualitative researchers are crucial to the validity of qualitative research.

Furthermore, they discuss theory and methodology. The authors scrutinize the phenomenological perspective with a theoretical perspective known as symbolic interactionism (social constructionism – constructivism). Additional theoretical perspectives, including ethnomethodology, feminist research, institutional ethnography, postmodernism, narrative analysis, and multi-sited, global methods are discussed. Besides, the authors address three questions to differentiate between the theoretical perspectives: “What is the relationship between the observer and the observed?” “Whose side are we on?” “Who cares about the research?”

The second chapter describes the research design and pre-field work of qualitative studies. In a research design, the authors magnify that qualitative researchers start with general research questions and interests, and a general idea of how many settings or people they intend to study. Hence, qualitative researchers modify their samples in a continuous way throughout

the research, there is no rigid plan regarding the nature and sample size of cases. In this chapter, how qualitative researchers select settings is also discussed. Selecting a setting requires diligence and patience. In addition, the authors briefly discuss that researchers have to obtain approval from institutional review boards (IRBs) to conduct their study. Researchers should assess the risks and benefits of research and get informed consent from participants to take part in the research.

Another portion of this chapter is focused on proposal writing. Even if writing a formal proposal is difficult in qualitative research, the authors suggest that researchers conduct a pilot study before writing a proposal. The contents of a proposal will depend on the standards and conventions associated with the academic program for the students and funders for a researcher seeking funds. The contents may include a review of literature, research questions (flow from the literature review), theoretical perspective, and qualitative methodology plus the research design (the procedures that will be used, strategies for identifying and obtaining access to informants, sample size, data collection, and recording procedures, data analysis procedures, the significance of the research, timeliness, and tentative outline of the completed study).

This chapter also discusses how researchers access organizations, public and quasi-public settings, and private settings. Access to organizations requires permission from gatekeepers and access to quasi-public settings requires permission from the owner or manager; however, access to public settings does not require negotiation with gatekeepers. In the case of private settings, consent for the study must be negotiated with each individual. Besides, what researchers should tell gatekeepers and informants as well as collecting data to obtain access is discussed. Finally, the chapter ends by describing covert research and its related ethics.

In the third chapter, "Participant observation: In the field," first, the authors discuss entering the field. When entering the field for the first time, researchers should make informants feel comfortable about getting acceptance. They also provide examples of previous researchers and what they face with the informants while entering the field. The other portion of the chapter is discussing negotiating the role of the researcher. The researcher may face such problems as being forced into a role incompatible with conducting research, being told what and when to observe, and people trying to structure the times at which observers can visit.

Additionally, establishing rapport with informants is discussed in the chapter. The authors put some guidelines in establishing rapport: pay homage to their routines, establish what you have in common with people, help people out, be humble, and act interested. Participation is another sub-topic discussed in the chapter. Researchers should actively participate to get informants acceptance; however, they should avoid acting and talking in ways that do not fit their personality. Researchers also have to select key informants from whom they become friendly during the study, even if they should develop close and open relationships with all informants.

Further, the authors clearly indicate the difficulties faced in field relations and that researchers should keep a professional distance from informants in forming relationships. The authors also list the field tactics that could be used by observers to broaden their knowledge of informants as: acting naive, being at the right place at the right time, running errands and doing favors, not letting people know exactly what you are studying, and aggressive field tactics. In asking questions, researchers should know what to ask and not to ask, as well as how to phrase questions. In addition, researchers should be familiar with the languages of informants.

In this chapter, how to record field notes is also described in detail. The authors provide hints for recalling words and actions and provide guidelines to be considered in writing field notes. In addition, researchers should describe settings, activities, and people in a descriptive way. Furthermore, they have to record not only dialogue accessories, but also their own comments, remarks, actions, and what they don't understand. The authors also describe that researchers have to set some boundaries in terms of the number and types of settings to be

studied and have to leave the field at the data saturation point. In addition, they describe triangulation, using different sources of data to deeply understand the setting and informants. Finally, ethics in the field are discussed.

The fourth chapter focuses on in-depth interviewing. In-depth interviews are advantageous if the research interests are relatively well defined, settings and people are not otherwise accessible, the researcher has time constraints, and/or if the researcher is interested in understanding a broad range of people or settings.

Additionally, how informants are selected is discussed in the chapter. The size of the sample is determined towards the end of the research rather than at the beginning. The use of snowballing is the easiest way to find informants. While approaching informants, the researcher's motives and intentions, anonymity, the final say, money, and logistics are important issues to be considered by the researcher.

This chapter also posits that researchers should understand the interview in context and manage the interview situation by creating the following characteristics: being nonjudgmental, letting people talk, paying attention, and being sensitive. Getting people to talk about what is important to them is an important consideration. Researchers may follow descriptive questioning, solicited narratives, the log-interview approach, the go-along, and personal and organizational documents to guide initial interviews. The interview guide is an important document that lists general areas to be covered with each informant and is subject to change. When and how to probe and crosscheck the responses, relations with informants, and the process of recording interviews are also discussed in the chapter. Recording devices allow the researcher to capture more information than relying on memory. Furthermore, group interviews, particularly focus groups, are discussed. Finally, the authors describe maintaining the interviewer's journal as important when considering what should be covered in interviewing and interpreting the data.

The authors borrow the term "montage," that is, the technique of selecting, editing, and piecing together separate sections of the film to form a continuous whole to lead chapter five. They argue by supporting the idea that one must be careful not to be limited by a single research approach. Thus, they believe that combining qualitative and quantitative methods is promising though they doubt the researchers' true combination of these two approaches. In the first topic of this chapter, the authors borrowed the title, "Disrupting the Commonsense World of Everyday Life," from Harold Garfinkel (1967, as cited in Taylor et al., 2016), which he used in his influential book, *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, so as to discover the hidden truth within the intentional phenomenon that he created. Again, they describe the ethical dilemmas: whether the researcher brackets him/herself or writes his own feelings and personal trial. The authors explain this to the readers by citing practical examples from a number of studies. They try to weigh whether people are considering qualitative research as an autobiography.

Like before, the authors convincingly bring a qualitative study from a book entitled "Entering a World Without Words" (Goode, 1994, as cited in Taylor et al., 2016) and explain that if the researcher starts by bracketing himself – embarking without a word of him/herself – and applies a number of creative ways to gather data from the participants, then the results will be trustworthy. In addition, they tell us that the qualitative researcher needs to be provocative and groundbreaking and advise that researchers experiment with new approaches to understanding. Moreover, the authors highlight the importance of personal documents. They particularly advise the use of these personal documents along with interviewing and direct observation in undertaking qualitative research. They also point out the rise of the internet and social media sites as a multitude of new kinds of personal writing.

By using the works of Bogdan and Marshall (1997, as cited in Taylor et al., 2016), the authors give an insight into the benefits of picturing a particular phenomenon like disability and organizing and sorting the pictures according to the historical context, and the intentions

of those who produced become crucial in analysis of that specific phenomenon. Photography and videotaping are also excellent sources for qualitative analysis as they can capture details that would otherwise be forgotten or go unnoticed. This is also explained in detail with illustrative examples.

They also elaborate, that like personal documents, official records and public documents lend insight into the perspectives, assumptions, concerns, and activities of those who produce them.

Finally, the authors wind up the chapter by pointing out the analysis techniques that historians and sociologists research. They describe that historians tend to specialize in analyzing societies in terms of time and place whereas sociologists study social structures and processes across different eras and cultures. Additionally, stated archival research is useful in analyzing and understanding specific social institutions.

Chapter six provides useful insights for the researcher regarding the data analysis in qualitative research. It discusses how qualitative researchers can make sense of and analyze data and describes strategies and techniques that help get the most out of the collected data. Firstly, narratives are elaborated as in the descriptive and theoretical studies. The authors articulate that qualitative research should provide a thick description of social life. They elaborate on the researcher's position in participant observation studies and in-depth interviewing that convey a sense of being there and attempting to give readers a feeling of informants' inner experiences, respectively. Since the researchers try to paint a real picture of what people say and how they act in their everyday lives, the authors also argue ethnography is the most well-known form of descriptive study. This is due to the reasons that descriptive ethnographies are marked by minimal interpretation and conceptualization.

In addition, they argue by supporting Glaser and Strauss's argument that the very aim of theoretical studies developing or generating social theory and concepts. Moreover, the authors proclaim that most people have no idea how to make sense of the data they have collected. They show the best way to learn inductive analysis is by reading qualitative studies and articles to see how other researchers have made sense of their data. They also note, "In qualitative research, data collection and analysis go hand in hand. Throughout participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and other qualitative research, researchers are constantly theorizing and trying to make sense of their data" (Taylor et al., 2016, p. 169). To the qualitative researchers, the authors highlight two distinct activities that data analysis, that is, the identification of themes, development of concepts and propositions, and codification of the data; and refining one's understanding of the subject matter. They give several suggestions on how to handle these activities.

The other point the authors highlight is constructing life histories in qualitative writing. By bringing practical examples and aligning them with the concept of the career which is the sequence of social positions people occupy throughout their lives and the changing definitions of themselves and the world they hold at various stages of that sequence (Becker, 1963, as cited in Taylor et al., 2016; Goffman, 1961, as cited in Taylor et al., 2016; Hughes, 1937, as cited in Taylor et al., 2016), they provide useful insights for the reader. Here, the authors clearly show the reader the way the person's life history is constructed.

Part two of this book focuses on the writing up of qualitative studies. It contains six chapters from chapters seven through twelve. The authors offer some guidelines for use in writing qualitative studies from the lessons they learned from a number of qualitative research books about the writing process (McCloskey, 1990, as cited in Taylor et al., 2016); Richardson, (1992, as cited in Taylor et al., 2016; Richardson, 1994, as cited in Taylor et al., 2016; Richardson, 1996, as cited in Taylor et al., 2016); Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, as cited in Taylor et al., 2016); Becker, (2007, as cited in Taylor et al., 2016); Wolcott (2009, as cited in Taylor et al., 2016); Emerson et al. (2011, as cited in Taylor et al., 2016).

Chapter seven deals with writing up and publishing qualitative studies, that is, the entire study's culmination. Here, the authors clearly describe what a qualitative researcher should tell readers so as to enable readers to discount the author's account or to understand it in the context of how it was produced. Accordingly, they pinpoint each and every piece of information the reader expects from the research. Moreover, the authors provide some tips on writing qualitative research. They state that the ability to write clearly and concisely is an important skill and even most people find it difficult to write at times. Even experienced writers who have published much can have problems getting started on new projects. To curb this, they suggest some recommendations that might be useful in qualitative writing: making an experiment with different ways of writing, deciding what audience one wishes to reach and adjusting the style and content accordingly, deciding on one's persona, letting readers know where the writer is going, being concise and direct, grounding one's writing in specific examples, editing early drafts carefully, and having colleagues or friends read and comment on the writing.

The authors proclaim that after having read countless student research reports and dissertations as well as articles submitted for journal publication, they highlighted the common mistakes in writing from qualitative data: letting quotes make points, overuse of colorful quotes or examples, changing quotes, insufficient quotes, lengthy quotes & data overkill, quoting observer's comments, quantitative language lapses, overstatement, orphan findings and royalty, cheap literary devices, failing to acknowledge the contributions of others, moral superiority. Finally, the authors critically advise getting the qualitative studies published. They argue that the publication process requires a major commitment of time and energy. They state word by word that,

If you are not willing to make this commitment, you are unlikely to publish your work. Publishing requires persistence and self-confidence. It is not an activity for people with weak egos. All authors have their work rejected at one time or another. (p. 210)

They also advise in detail the paper get published.

Chapters eight through twelve contain articles the authors wrote that are based on the methods described in the book from chapters one to seven. They bring these up as examples of some of the many ways in which qualitative studies can be presented.

Chapter eight, entitled, "You're Not a Retard, You're Just Wise": Disability, Social Identity, and Family Networks," is based on Taylor's participant observation study of the Duke family, referred to in this book. In this chapter, the authors report on how the meaning of disability is constructed by the Dukes and others in their social network.

Producing Family Time: Practices of Leisure Activity Beyond the Home, is compiled in chapter nine based on DeVault's study of families in two community zoos. It is based on a method of unobtrusive or naturalistic observation, combined with very brief on-site interviews.

Chapter ten, "Ethnicity and Expertise: Racial-Ethnic Knowledge in Sociological Research," is based on DeVault's interview research on the careers of dietitians and nutrition educators. In this article, she applies a narrative analysis approach to a single interview with an African American dietitian in order to illuminate some of the dynamics of race in a predominantly White field of work.

Chapter eleven, "Citizen Portraits: Photos of People with Disabilities as Personal Keepsakes," is an excerpt from Bogdan's latest book on visual sociology. Bogdan's methodology is described in chapter five.

Chapter 12, "'They Asked for a Hard Job': WWII Conscientious Objectors on the Front Lines," is an edited version of a chapter in Taylor's 2009 study of World War II conscientious objectors (COs) who performed public service at state mental hospitals and training schools as

an alternative to serving in the military. The chapter describes the conditions the COs found at the institutions at which they were placed. Taylor's study is based on archival research and oral histories, as described in chapter five.

After presenting these studies, the authors include appendixes containing participant observation, field notes, and an aid for the construction of an interview guide, as well as a reference list for Chapters one to seven.

Strength and Weakness

From the reviewers' point of view, the simple language of the book and style of writing throws light on the reader's mind to grasp much from it. As a strength, this book is an all-inclusive guide and a resource for researchers in social science. To make the reader comfortable, chapters one to seven began by mentioning the key points to be addressed, and the rest of the chapters are selected studies of the authors based on the methods described in the book in these early chapters. This allows the reader to easily align the description of the concept of qualitative research methods with the embedded resources. This in turn makes the book user-friendly. Moreover, the book's language is very easy and fits the book title starting with the word "introduction." The integration of citations in every content of the book makes it credible and very interesting.

On the other hand, the weakness of this book is shown in the second part; that is, from chapters eight through twelve, where the authors bring their study up as an example of qualitative research undertaken based on the explanations of the previous chapters. In these chapters, they simply present the studies without aligning them with the said explanations. This may leave the readers under ambiguity. In conclusion, this book can serve as an ideal user manual and reference work on qualitative research for social and academic fields.

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Article Citation

Worku, M., Alemayehu, H., Ashebir, L., & Debela, K. L. (2023). “An all-inclusive, user-friendly resource”: A review of Taylor, Bogdan, and DeVault’s *Introduction to qualitative research methods: A guidebook and resource* (4th ed.). *The Qualitative Report*, 28(7), 1895-1901. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2023.6488>
