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## Ophthalmology for the Myopic Methodologist: A Review of Five Ways of Doing Qualitative Analysis

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### Abstract

In *Five Ways of Doing Qualitative Analysis*, Frederick J. Wertz, Kathy Charmaz, Linda M. McMullen, Ruthellen Josselson, and Rosemarie Anderson provide students and researchers with both a broad knowledge base and specific examples of each of their preferred methods of analysis. The authors apply their respective expertise of phenomenological psychology, grounded theory, discourse analysis, narrative research, and intuitive inquiry to sixth author Emalinda McSpadden's narrative of responding to an unfortunate situation. The result is a comprehensive comparison of each method emphasizing unique strengths and weaknesses in each approach as well as the reflexivity required of researchers utilizing such analyses.

### Keywords

Phenomenological Psychology, Grounded Theory, Discourse Analysis, Narrative Research, Intuitive Inquiry

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## Ophthalmology for the Myopic Methodologist: A Review of *Five Ways of Doing Qualitative Analysis*

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*In Five Ways of Doing Qualitative Analysis, Frederick J. Wertz, Kathy Charmaz, Linda M. McMullen, Ruthellen Josselson, and Rosemarie Anderson provide students and researchers with both a broad knowledge base and specific examples of each of their preferred methods of analysis. The authors apply their respective expertise of phenomenological psychology, grounded theory, discourse analysis, narrative research, and intuitive inquiry to sixth author Emalinda McSpadden's narrative of responding to an unfortunate situation. The result is a comprehensive comparison of each method emphasizing unique strengths and weaknesses in each approach as well as the reflexivity required of researchers utilizing such analyses. Key Words: Phenomenological Psychology, Grounded Theory, Discourse Analysis, Narrative Research, Intuitive Inquiry.*

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My first impression of this text is to compare it to a poem that I find useful in conveying messages to students about triangulation, mixed methods, and a multi-disciplinary approach to building knowledge:

It was six men of Indostan  
To learning much inclined,  
Who went to see an Elephant  
(Though all of them were blind),  
That each by observation  
Might satisfy his mind.  
The *First* approached the Elephant,  
And happening to fall  
Against his broad and sturdy side,  
At once began to bawl:  
"God bless me!—but the Elephant  
Is very like a wall!"  
The *Second*, feeling of the tusk,  
Cried: "Ho!—what have we here  
So very round and smooth and sharp?  
To me 't is mighty clear  
This wonder of an Elephant  
Is very like a spear!"  
The *Third* approached the animal,  
And happening to take  
The squirming trunk within his hands,

Thus boldly up and spake:  
 "I see," quoth he, "the Elephant  
 Is very like a snake!"  
 The *Fourth* reached out an eager hand,  
 And felt above the knee.  
 "What most this wondrous beast is like  
 Is very plain," quoth he,  
 "T'is clear enough the Elephant  
 Is very like a tree!"  
 The *Fifth*, who chanced to touch the ear,  
 Said, "E'en the blindest man  
 Can tell what this resembles most;  
 Deny the fact who can,  
 This marvel of an Elephant  
 Is very like a fan!"  
 The *Sixth* no sooner had begun  
 About the beast to grope,  
 Than, seizing on the swinging tail  
 That fell within his scope,  
 "I see," quoth he, "the Elephant  
 Is very like a rope!"  
 And so these men of Indostan  
 Disputed loud and long,  
 Each in his own opinion  
 Exceeding stiff and strong,  
 Though each was partly in the right,  
 And all were in the wrong!  
 (Saxe, 1872)

Much like each of the blind men of Hindustan, my first impression is partly right, but mostly wrong. Frederick J. Wertz, Kathy Charmaz, Linda M. McMullen, Ruthellen Josselson, and Rosemarie Anderson, the authors of *Five Ways of Doing Qualitative Analysis*, are neither blind nor wrong. Combining their individual and unique methodological insights provides the reader with a much clearer picture of the elephant in the room: sixth author Emalinda McSpadden's narrative response to a prompt asking graduate psychology students to describe "a situation in which something very unfortunate happened and how the person responded" (Wertz et al., 2011, pg. 103).

Employing their own expertise in a specific form of qualitative analysis, the authors compare and contrast insights and results related to "the Teresa texts" (the name given to McSpadden's narrative before the decision to include her as a co-author). Wertz views the narrative through the lens of phenomenological psychology, Charmaz via grounded theory, McMullen from a discourse analysis perspective, Josselson employs the gaze of narrative research, and last but certainly not least, Anderson looks at the data through intuitive inquiry. Early on, the authors outline specific goals for the text, "to provide a broad knowledge base that can serve as the foundation for understanding and employing the typical procedures used in our five specific approaches," "to provide

readers with a concrete, detailed, and intimate experience as they enter the qualitative movement by following each of us through our analytic practices,” and “to contribute original insights into how these different approaches relate to historically exemplary qualitative research and how they compare with each other, in order to promote a better understanding of their common features as well as their distinctive purposes and strengths” (Wertz et al., 2011, pp. 4-5). To gain a more intense exposure to these goals and other introductory thoughts and perspectives, prospective readers can always surf over to the book’s Guilford Press web site located at [http://www.guilford.com/cgi-bin/cartscript.cgi?page=pr/wertz.htm&dir=research/res\\_qual](http://www.guilford.com/cgi-bin/cartscript.cgi?page=pr/wertz.htm&dir=research/res_qual) to read Chapter One in its entirety.

All of these goals are met and exceeded in a text that simultaneously provides depth and breadth. Beginning with a discussion of how innovative and creative qualitative approaches led to the five methodologies examined, the authors provide valuable historical context. They describe how the works of Sigmund Freud, William James, Abraham Maslow, Lawrence Kohlberg, and Gordon Allport led to a “call for methodology” (Wertz et al., 2011, p. 42) then proceed to discuss how the call was answered by James Flanagan, Amedeo Giorgi, Barney Glaser, Anselm Strauss, Jonathan Potter, Margaret Wetherell, Jerome Bruner, Ted Sarbin, Don Polkinghorne, Rosemarie Anderson and others. The first third of the book could stand alone as an introduction to the evolving history of qualitative research, but instead provides a perfect prelude to *Five Ways of Doing Qualitative Analysis*. The second section begins with a brief description of “The Teresa Texts” and then each author analyzes the texts using their own specific approach.

The third section of the book allows each author to compare and contrast his or her findings with the others. As a result, the reader is exposed to a multi-vocal explanation of the strengths, weaknesses, and unique attributes of each approach to qualitative analysis. Afterward, McSpadden responds to each analysis and offers her thoughts. Their conclusion includes a final discussion on the ethics of collaboration, participant involvement, and the value of multifaceted knowledge as well as individual voices. Each author then reflects on lessons learned from this project and collectively they offer a list of take-home messages.

In a Jain telling of the story of the blind men and the elephant, a king explains: “All of you are right. The reason every one of you is telling it differently is because each one of you touched the different part of the elephant. So, actually the elephant has all the features you mentioned” (“Elephant and the,” 2011). This conclusion seems much more appropriate than the one offered previously, given that the authors provide ample evidence for the strength of each individual method of qualitative analysis while also giving strong support to the argument for a multiple or mixed methods approach. The authors state in their introduction that:

This volume is intended to inform and provoke thought among qualitative researchers who study human experience. It also serves as an introduction to the “nuts and bolts” of qualitative research, addressing not merely the *why* and *what*, but also the *how* of qualitative methods. We hope that our analysis of lived experience (i.e., experience as it concretely and spontaneously takes place in actual human life) is of interest to the full

range of disciplines concerned with human existence (Wertz et al., 2011, p. 11).

While I can only speak from the perspective of a qualitative criminologist at the University of South Florida, I can say without reservation that this is a text that I will continue to recommend and revisit. In doing so I hope we can all learn to touch the many different parts of the elephant that is qualitative data analysis!

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### Author Note

Carl Root received a Master of Science in Criminal Justice at Eastern Kentucky University. He is currently continuing his education at the University of South Florida and pursuing a Ph.D. in Criminology. Carl's research interests include cultural criminology, qualitative methods, and critical theories of crime and justice. He can be contacted at Department of Criminology, *University of South Florida*, 4202 East Fowler Ave, SOC107, Tampa, FL 33620-7200 or by email at [carlroot@mail.usf.edu](mailto:carlroot@mail.usf.edu).

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