

Qualitative Analysis: Practice and Innovation

Douglas Ezzy

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Douglas begins the book by saying "life fascinates me" (p. xii). Without doubt, his writing "fascinates me" too. This book is fascinating, as it is not only theoretically grounded but it contains numerous personal accounts and practical examples throughout. Essentially, Ezzy constructs his book from a qualitatively methodological paradigm; that is, personal narratives and "thick" descriptions are relevant. Knowledge is constructed from "stories" and we learn a great deal from reading people's stories. Ezzy has beautifully presented his "stories" in this book. Ezzy writes this book not only as an experienced researcher, but also as a good academic writer, and this makes the book extremely interesting, fascinating and enjoyable.

The book focuses on the engagement of dialogue of traditional and innovative research approaches. Ezzy argues that this dialogue "leads to a qualitative practice that is richer, more robust and more useful" (p. xiii). Theoretically, Ezzy encourages readers, throughout the book, to delve into the process of discovery of "the already known and the as yet unknown" (p. xiii). The essence of qualitative research is a discovery of the voice of the other, or the story of the unknown, and bringing these unheard voices and unknown stories into dialogue with preexisting knowledge in order to build new understandings and new theory. In contrast to an assumption held by some qualitative researchers that qualitative analysis should not rely on any preexisting theory but the theory is built from the data generating from the research, Ezzy argues: "Rigorously conducted qualitative research does not pretend to be uninfluenced by preexisting understandings. Rather, it actively engages these preexisting understandings, theories and assumptions, allowing them to be transformed and changed so that new theory can be developed" (p. xiii). Practically, Ezzy provides some of the diversity of data analysis methods and proposes new ways of writing qualitative research findings. These too are engaged in the dialogue between tradition and innovation.

The book comprises six chapters. Each chapter focuses on differing interpretive processes. Chapter one focuses on the discussion of traditional methodologies such as grounded theory, ethnography, phenomenology and symbolic interactionism, and recent innovative approaches including postmodernism, feminism, cultural

studies and hermeneutics. Ezzy argues that each tradition contributes to qualitative research in a different way and each should not be seen as more superior or inferior to another. It seems, however, that Ezzy inclines toward a hermeneutic approach; the theory of interpretation. He argues: "hermeneutic practices are interpretive practices [and] the craft of the qualitative researcher is a hermeneutic craft. This book is, in many ways, a working out of the hermeneutic practices of qualitative researchers" (p. xv).

Chapter two is more politically and ethically focused. Qualitative research is relevant to the policy process, as its findings may influence (or fail to influence) public policies. What we find in our research, and eventually write about, may have political consequences for our participants. Therefore, rigour and ethics in research practice are extremely important. A more political-based research methodology taking feminist and participatory action approaches is discussed in this chapter. Here Ezzy argues for the primary nature of gender and oppressed minorities as a category of experience and points out that "both feminism and participatory action research have demonstrated that qualitative research is unavoidably political and personal" (p. 44).

In chapter three, Ezzy argues that the interpretation of qualitative data begins during data collection processes. Some techniques, which can be used during the collection of data in order to initiate data analysis, are provided. These include team meetings, the review of transcripts by the participants, journals and memos, and data coding. In feminist and participatory action research, it is a common practice to have participants engaging in various aspects of the research as co-researchers including the data analysis process. In this chapter, Ezzy succinctly points to some of the value and dangers of doing so.

Chapter four deals with data coding and interpretation of the meanings of the text. Traditional practices of thematic or grounded theory and content analysis methods and more innovative approaches of cultural studies and narrative analysis are discussed in great detail. However, in doing so, Ezzy links these processes to theoretical frameworks and cultural processes. I find the narrative analysis extremely interesting indeed.

Qualitative researchers and others have increasingly adopted computer-assisted qualitative data analysis

(CAQDAS) and more CAQDAS software is being developed. Ezzy, in chapter five, reviews some advantages and disadvantages of utilising CAQDAS. Ezzy warns us too that computer CAQDAS software might assist with particular qualitative research with particular sorts of data, it may not work with others and it may not be the best choice, and the potential benefits and pitfalls are discussed in this chapter. My only concern, and it is relative minor, is that although Ezzy argues that particular computer-assisted qualitative data analysis programs are not reviewed as the review would be "quickly out of date", it might have been more useful for readers if one or two programs had been provided in detail. However, Ezzy did provide a list of internet sites that readers may wish to look for up-to-date information and demonstration.

The final chapter focuses on the writing process of qualitative research findings. Ezzy argues that the writing process is "as much a part of the analytic and interpretive process as is data collection" (p. xvi). Discovery, the essence of qualitative research, also occurs while we write. Writing should, therefore, begin when we begin our data collection. In this chapter too, Ezzy engages in the dialogue of the traditional ways of writing styles with more recent trends including poetry and performance and the inclusion

of a researcher's personal accounts in his or her research reports. Too often, a qualitative researcher is told not to use a first person in the writing as it is too close to a personal account. As Ezzy argues, this practice engages a researcher with the research process in a more meaningful way. Ezzy also warns us about the political and ethnical ramifications of conducting and writing qualitative research.

The format of the book is user-friendly. Each chapter contains sub-headings, which makes it easy to read and follow the argument. Summary boxes and figures are also provided. References are up-to-date and interesting and the index is comprehensive.

In sum, the book is a valuable reference for researchers in health social sciences. It is well suited for students embarking on doing qualitative research analysis, and for academics teaching qualitative research methods, as the book contains many practical aspects. This book is well worth adding to your collection on research methods in health.

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