

Book Reviews

Qualitative Research

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JOOST BEUVING and GEERT DE VRIES, *Doing Qualitative Research: The Craft of Naturalistic Inquiry*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015. 220 pp. ISBN 9789089647658.

A significant amount of work has been done over the last several decades in discussing qualitative social research (what it implies in terms of practice, what its underlying principles are, where its challenges appear etc.). In their book *Doing Qualitative Research: The Craft of Naturalistic Inquiry*, Joost Beuving and Geert de Vries undertake a similar task and carry it out with remarkable sharpness and clarity. The book is aimed at undergraduate and graduate students interested in qualitative methodologies and it is faithful to its public. The stylistic accessibility, the refusal to build upon assumed or expected knowledge of the readers and the synthetic approach to each stage of social research individualize this volume and make it highly recommendable for teaching purposes.

Thematically, the focus falls on naturalistic inquiry, understood as ‘qualitative research by ordinary means into everyday situations, aiming to disturb these situations as little as possible’ (p. 19). While this definition might appear problematic in terms of what qualifies as an everyday situation or how one establishes the ordinary character of their research tools, I believe it is a merit, rather than a shortcoming that this type of interrogations are not tackled. Beuving and de Vries excel at building upon certain typical constructions of social knowledge in challenging others. In this case, they are reshaping the common understanding about conducting social research, which is ambitious enough in itself. Thus, additionally elaborating on concepts of everyday life and ordinary social interaction would result in a more accurate, but less intelligible definition. To be clear, I am insisting on the definition of naturalistic inquiry not only because it is the central topic of the book, but also because it is illustrative of how the authors prioritize certain aspects of their message, while allowing others to remain in the background, in their taken for granted form.

Formally, the book is divided into 8 chapters, plus an introduction and an epilogue. Despite the chapters not being further grouped, in my reading, the book has 3 parts: Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 offer an overview of the ontological and epistemological issues underlying qualitative research. Chapters 3 to 6 discuss the collection of empirical data. Chapters 7 and 8 focus on the elaboration of interpretative and explanatory frames for the empirical material which had been gathered. The schematic presentation of the intellectual climate from which grounded theory and naturalistic inquiry emerged is one of the most

solid parts of the book. By exploring qualitative research in relation to a number of axes (rationalism/empiricism, positivism/interpretivism, functionalism/ symbolic interactionism), the authors highlight the ontological roots of methodology, without sacrificing the overall practical orientation of their discourse. Another strength of the text is the balance between not providing cook book recipes for conducting social research (a point on which the authors insist), while at the same time managing to elaborate some useful and flexible guidelines. In this sense, the sub-chapters about the unfolding of an open interview are especially welcome.

Less convincing is the discussion about the place of naturalistic inquiry in the general context of qualitative social research. The text leaves room for doubt about what it is that particularizes naturalistic inquiry in relation to other ways of doing qualitative research (for example: Is it a type of ethnography? How is it different from grounded theory? Is it an overarching concept synonymous with qualitative methodology?). Another aspect of the book I find confusing is the lack of consistency with respect to the meaning added by the researcher to the actions of those whose social lives he/she is studying. Two main approaches seem to alternate: one presents the meaning constructed by the researcher as a psychoanalytic insight to which the subjects do not have access through their own meaning making (Chapter 4 and Chapter 7); the other views the meaning added by the researcher as an account of structural elements of which the subject has little awareness (Chapter 8). While these two approaches are not incompatible, each of them is presented in different parts of the book as the recommendable way for the qualitative researcher to construct meaning.

An interesting section in the volume is Chapter 6, 'Disentangling society: the analysis of social networks'. I argue this chapter would have been best fitted in the part of the book dedicated to ontology, since the qualitative exploration of social networks is not primarily a methodological choice, but an entirely distinct understanding of society. Nevertheless, Beuving and de Vries' choice of including a relational perspective in their summary of naturalistic inquiry must definitely be applauded. Through the topics it covers and the pleasant style, the book succeeds in getting close to the readers and guiding their steps into qualitative research.

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GIAMPIETRO GOBO and SERGIO MAUCERI, *Constructing Survey Data: An Interactional Approach*. London: SAGE, 2014. 392 pp. ISBN: 9781849201773 (pbk) £25.99.

The book articulates a constructive, often pragmatic critique of surveys based on standardised interviews with closed-answer questions. The authors draw on a wide range of material, but their critique is strongly anchored in the writings of Lazarsfeld and the cognitivist and pragmatic turns of the late 20th century.

Before beginning and whilst reading this book, it is worth remembering Gobo and Mauceri aim to improve rather than replace established survey methodology by drawing on a type of reflexivity which is more often associated with qualitative than quantitative