



Qualitative Inquiry: Past, Present, and Future: A Critical Reading

Denzin, Norman K.; and Giardina, Michael D., eds.
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Book Review

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Norman Denzin and Michael Giardina have edited an amazing collection of cutting-edge articles on qualitative research methodologies and methods in their new volume, *Qualitative Inquiry Past, Present, and Future: A Critical Reader*. The editors selected twenty-four chapters for this volume from nine years of the Congress of Qualitative Inquiry proceedings. The authors represent a variety of disciplines including sport studies, education, psychology, sociology, communications, and gender studies.

In the opening chapter, Denzin and Giardina provide an overview of the developments and arguments in qualitative research methodologies since the Congress published its first volume in 2005. They argue that qualitative research is “at a pivotal crossroads: We live in a historical present that cries out for emancipatory visions, for visions that inspire transformative inquiries, and for inquiries that can provide a moral authority to move people to struggle and resist oppression” (12). They explore the paradigm wars since the 1980s and create the space for this volume in the works of C. Wright Mills, Paulo Freire, bell hooks, and Cornel West. After this introduction, the book is divided into four sections, a coda, and an epilogue.

Section I contains four chapters that explore the Philosophy of Inquiry. These chapters engage important concepts including disciplines sharing language using Bakhtin’s concept of chronotopes, the turn towards praxis, the role of institutional review boards, power, research ethics, as well as subjects and agency. The six chapters in Section II (Politics of Evidence / Politics of Research) explore the struggle between qualitative research and the privileged position of scientifically based research. The authors then highlight a variety of factors that threaten the legitimacy of qualitative research including pressures from pro-profit universities,

the diminished role of faculty in university governance, and the rise of the national security state. Henry Giroux writes that “these may be dark times... but they don’t have to be, and that raises questions about what educators are going to do within the current historical climate to make sure that they do not succumb.... Resistance is no longer an option, it is a necessity” (216).

Section III, Methodological Imperatives, contains some of the most provocative and practical articles for active researchers. These articles engage an array of methodological techniques including empathetic interviewing, ethnography, performative writing, art-based methods, and autobiographical methods. Halley’s article on the production of death and Dillard’s work on memory and spirituality in particular push the frontier of methodological discussions.

Section IV, Indigenous and Decolonizing Interviews, provides four articles that advance the role of social justice in the research agenda. These authors engage multiple levels of struggle and as Puebla argues, “our knowledge about the social world has been tremendously useless when dealing with the urgency of social justice, social change, and democracy” (387).

In the Coda, Ellingson stresses the passion and pleasure of paying attention. The Epilogue contains an engaging dialogue on the future of qualitative inquiry. The dialogue itself was the result of e-mail exchanges between the two editors and five additional authors. Denzin and Guardina conclude: “qualitative inquiry is being pulled in multiple directions at once: pushing the boundaries of both traditional social science and interpretive research; engaging in struggle against oppressive institutional and political machinations, balancing the need for deep theoretical engagement with a praxical approach to the research act; and striving to engage with (if not change) the landscape on which qualitative inquiry currently sits... we have a job to do; let’s get to it” (462).

This is a powerful and inspirational volume. It is global in scope with articles from the United States, Europe, Africa, and New Zealand. The individual articles contain excellent bibliographies and insightful conclusions. They are well written and easily accessible to graduate readers. This volume is an important addition for theological libraries that serve schools with degrees in practical theology, emphasis in social justice, chaplaincy programs, and doctor of ministry degrees. Professors who teach theological methodological approaches and methods should consider adding selected articles from this volume to their required reading.

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