

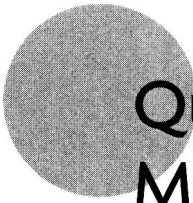
Qualitative
**RESEARCH
METHODS**
FOR THE
**SOCIAL
SCIENCES**

Sixth Edition

Bruce L. Berg

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● Sixth Edition



Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences

Bruce L. Berg

California State University, Long Beach



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Preface

IT HAS BEEN 18 YEARS since I sat down to draft the first edition of *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. Back then, as today, my goal is to offer a handbook for anyone interested in but unfamiliar with qualitative research methods. Throughout the years and six editions of this book, I have sought to create a guide both simple enough to follow and comprehensive enough to provide a wide array of fairly mainstream data-collection, organization, and analysis strategies. Beginning in the fifth edition, I also sought to bring fledgling qualitative researchers into the cyber age and began increasing the book's focus to include discussions of various Web sources, Web sites, and ways to incorporate the Internet into qualitative research other than by merely seeking literature. Throughout the years, I have envisioned my book being studied along with more general quantitative texts used in traditional research methods classes taught in various social science disciplines. As a supplement to other methods books, this book offers a way to better round the course to include a clear and concise qualitative orientation. I am gratified to learn that many programs have adopted my book as the main text (along with a supplemental book of readings) or as a standalone book in qualitative research methods classes.

Following the path I began to blaze in the fifth edition, the sixth edition intentionally focuses greater attention on using the Internet as both a resource and a means for accessing qualitative data. This new frontier of the Internet remains at present a nearly unharvested field of qualitative potential. The research style presented in this edition remains chiefly sociological; the application of data-gathering and data-analytic strategies, however, is not designed exclusively for students of sociology or for sociologists alone. In fact, an increasing number of my readers have come from the disciplines of English, nursing, education, social work, and business, as well as from the more traditional social sciences such as psychology, anthropology, criminology, and criminal justice.

The book's central purpose remains a desire to instruct inexperienced researchers in ways to effectively collect, organize, and make sense of qualitative

data. This edition also seeks to demystify the research process. I believe that what makes the research process frightening for many is a fear of the unknown. When novice researchers learn how a process or technique works, it becomes comfortable, relaxed, and—dare I say it?—easy!

In keeping with my general pedagogical style, this edition of the book moves readers beyond the point of collecting data without knowing what to do with it. The goal is to get fledgling researchers to design, collect, and analyze data and then to present results to the scientific community. This sixth edition continues to focus on current issues in the world of researchers, which include a serious concern about ethical behavior and protocols in research and a more reflexive and sensitive role for the researcher. Many research texts place ethics in the last chapter, or at least toward the conclusion of the book, creating the subliminal image of ethics being less important than other elements in research. In contrast to this style, I have placed the discussion of ethics in the third chapter; my intention in doing so is to impress on new researchers the importance of ethical concerns before they actually begin the research collection, organization, and analytic process. The discussion on ethics follows the chapter on design in hopes that these ethical concerns become a natural inclusion in the researcher's design process.

As in previous editions of this book, I emphasize a more reflexive researcher role and recognize the benefits of this orientation. In several places throughout the text, researcher reflexivity and research voice are explained and discussed. In fact, the use of the first person (*I, my, etc.*), which I began using in the second edition of this book, is a small example of my more reflexive researcher's role and voice. The orientation offered in this text does not fully embrace all elements of reflexivity but discusses several of the basic elements associated with this position. This is particularly true in Chapter 7, "Action Research," which discusses how the researcher may collaborate with shareholding subjects in the research, as well as in the section on photovoice, which describes a technique for allowing the participatory subject to offer his or her reflexive voice through photographs and narratives of these photographs.

As somewhat of a traditionalist, I continue to believe that researchers learn their craft through a combination of trial and error and "getting their hands dirty" with data. I also believe this process works best when guided by a more experienced researcher—a mentor. Yet even this approach works more effectively when the apprentice has a firm understanding of the basic elements of the research process. This book is designed especially for accomplishing this purpose.

As has been true in each of the previous editions of this book, my personal bias as a symbolic interactionist guides the choices I make and explanations I

offer throughout this text. Once again, I admit that the techniques presented are grounded in that theoretical approach. However, I continue to believe that the various techniques and strategies offered in this book can be equally effective when grounded in other theoretical perspectives. Inexperienced researchers should therefore take my presentation as suggestions and recommendations toward establishing a research foundation and not as the only methodological orientation available to them.

Finally, it is my deepest hope that after reading this book, students will think about research in a positive and even playful manner. Research can be extremely enjoyable when undertaken in the proper frame of mind. Even a trip to Disneyland can be ruined if you focus too much on the costs, the congested traffic, or the long lines. Many people go to Disneyland and never even notice these inconveniences. Research can be like a trip to Disneyland: it can be exciting, interesting, and rewarding, or it can be tedious, expensive, and frustrating. Trips to Disneyland, like undertaking research projects, are in large part a matter of how you think about them. But first you have to be able to think about research in a positive fashion. I hope that my book allows you to open your mind and your heart to the research process—enjoy the trip.

Acknowledgments

As in previous editions of this book, my first thanks go to my family: my beautiful wife of 30 years, Jill, and our two children, Kate and Alex. Their support for me during the original writing of this book and through each successive revision has been unflinching. They have provided me with loving sustenance that has allowed me to survive a heart attack, followed a few years later by quadruple bypass surgery—a scary time for all of us. I also continue to owe a debt of gratitude to my students, who provide regular feedback on material in this book and keep me grounded. I thank them again for their honesty, their patience, and their helpful suggestions.

I offer a special thanks to Karen Hansen, my editor for eighteen years. Even when others took a more hand's-on role in the actual editing of my book, and did an excellent job, Karen has always been *my editor*.

I am also very grateful to David Burlingame, Grand Valley State University; Phyllis Kuehn, California State University, Fresno; Tommie Nelms, Texas Womens' University; and Suzanne Renee Smith, Washington State University, Vancouver, readers and users of this book who provided constructive criticism as I set about revising this sixth edition. I am also indebted to Peter Adler, University of Denver; Robert Benford, University of Nebraska; Thomas G. Bloomberg,

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