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Making the Complicated Accessible: Kakali Bhattacharya's Fundamentals of Qualitative Research: A Practice Guide

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Abstract

In this book review, the text, *Fundamentals of Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide* by Kakali Bhattacharya, is considered. Attention is given to the way the author takes complicated ideas and makes them accessible. The audience and potential uses of the book are also considered.

Keywords

Qualitative Design, Methods, Methodology

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Making the Complicated Accessible: Kakali Bhattacharya's *Fundamentals of Qualitative Research: A Practice Guide*

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*In this book review, the text, *Fundamentals of Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide* by Kakali Bhattacharya, is considered. Attention is given to the way the author takes complicated ideas and makes them accessible. The audience and potential uses of the book are also considered. Keywords: *Qualitative Design, Methods, Methodology**

Kakali Bhattacharya's book, *Fundamentals of Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide*, acts a kind of roadmap to the sometimes-overwhelming world of qualitative inquiry. As an educator who has just begun to appreciate what feels like the tip of the qualitative iceberg, I found much to appreciate in this text—and as someone who sometimes receives questions from colleagues and students about the fundamental nature of this research universe, I feel as though I have found a companion guide.

Bhattacharya's credentials to write the book are rooted in her own experience as a professor focused on research methods, and one gets the sense of an expert teacher in both the way the material is communicated and in the way the author organizes the text. What Bhattacharya offers in this book may be a breath of fresh air for those of us who are searching for a text that does not work like a dense collection of essays, mystifying what is already mysterious. The author clearly has no need to hide behind dense terminology, instead taking the path of greater comprehensibility.

Through accessible language and interactive exercises, Bhattacharya breaks down erudite research paradigms and explains epistemologies, often representing these ideas in textual and visual forms. These descriptions and explorations never feel like the Cliff's Notes versions, but rather feel as though they are written by someone who is deeply familiar with them. The choice to conclude chapters with exercises, in particular, lends the book a "ready" feeling for working with students and incorporating the text into instruction.

Bhattacharya seems to have a gift for taking complexity and expressing ideas in a more understandable way. When it comes to addressing the various strands of qualitative research, the reader is greeted with a snapshot of what the approach is like, as well as quick series of citations for further exploration. These sections would be recommended reading for any doctoral candidate in my reach when considering the design of a qualitative study and would likely make the process much less stressful for both student and mentor.

Further attention is given to the major methodologies that researchers can employ, and their step-by-step considerations of methods, including interviews and observations. The author includes examples of mapping in observational settings, as well as in the process of analysis, and these artifacts underscore the descriptions of the work. When considering methodologies, we are given an overview, but the author then goes into deeper description regarding the potential avenues a research can take. For example, when considering ethnography, the reader is offered a menu of choices, with concise descriptions, including realist ethnography, critical ethnography, virtual ethnography, digital ethnography, and visual ethnography. Chapters like these energize me as a researcher, just given the sheer number of options I have in pursuing academic inquiry.

The accessible approach holds true for theoretical frameworks, and this alone makes the book worth reading. Bhattacharya gives the reader a breakdown of the framework, following by tenets and characteristics. The method of delivering this information aligns with the rest of the text, with clarity and purpose. Bhattacharya even includes the other side of the conversation by offering critiques of the frameworks in succinct form. When I first approached theory in my work as a researcher, I represented my anxiety about this aspect of the process in the form a grim reaper as an illustration of the challenge ahead. Had I taken the time to get a copy of *Fundamentals of Qualitative Research*, my apprehensions would have likely been lessened. Rather than bury complicated ideas in more complex words, waving around terms like a grand marshal, the author seeks to convey meaning.

As someone who has been working to wrap their mind around qualitative inquiry for the past five years, I feel like this book is the inside track. In 204 pages, Bhattacharya accomplishes a descriptive overview, complete with a multitude of examples and thoughtful cautions, which seems to take other authors hundreds of pages. For the student who is new to this field, the length and manner of the book is inviting. This is certainly a text that would hold central position in any class I teach focused on qualitative research, and enough cannot be said for the of the way Bhattacharya sets up a ladder for us on the side of the ivory tower, and the focus is always on the meaning we derive from the work we do.

Reference

Bhattacharya, K. (2017). *Fundamentals of qualitative research: A practical guide*. New York, NY: Routledge.

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