

Book review by Eve Rapley in Qualitative Methods in Psychology Section (QMiP)
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Practising Research: Why you're always part of the research process even when you think you're not by Nollaig Frost (2016)

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In a crowded marketplace, yet another research textbook might struggle to get academic airtime. Often with a reputation for being dry and inaccessible, research methodology texts can fall within the 'dull but essential reading' category for researchers. Having recently read Nollaig Frost's latest publication, *Practising Research: Why You're Always Part of the Research Process Even When You Think You're Not*, I was struck by the freshness of her writing and the way in which she re-imagined research and rendered her thinking about researchers and researching to make it anything but 'dull but essential reading'.

Easily navigable and crisply laid out in six chapters, her positioning of the book as being squarely about the researcher, rather than being a 'how to' book of research, came through from the beginning. Anyone looking for a cookbook of how to do research should look elsewhere for inspiration. The premise of concentrating on the researcher in such a focused and all encompassing way served to give the book a distinct and innovative edge.

Frost's open, frank and eminently readable style meant it immediately secured and maintained my attention and interest throughout. The use of vignettes captured the 'realness' and human element of research with all of its daunting and fraught emotional complexity.

As a vehicle presenting the world of research and the researcher, they immediately set the tone for the book. Frost's numerous references to 'the human touch' was personal yet powerful and is likely to resonate strongly with readers, particularly those with some experience of researching from the perspective of themselves as being a research instrument. Importantly, it emphasises how humans construct and design research and, as such, our 'touch' is present in all research irrespective of the methodology or researcher worldview. The challenge and the requisite emotional buy-in for being a researcher was frank, yet inspiring. The rewards can be high, but no-one should

underestimate the role the researcher plays. This was especially pertinent in the light of perceptions that qualitative research is in some way easier to conduct than quantitative research.

The books claim to cover all the bases by being equally useful for new and experienced researchers is certainly well founded. However, I feel the pitch was probably more likely to be orientated towards the less experienced end of the spectrum. That said, the clear definitions and discussions around key aspects such as ontology, epistemology, reflexivity and ethics were likely to be equally useful to first time researchers, as well as providing useful revision for more seasoned ones. The reassuring and encouraging tone coupled with a hints and tips after each chapter summary served as a further feature of the utility and the usability of the text. The inclusion of a series of reflective questions throughout to prompt the reader to reflect upon what had been read, and to question it and themselves, added further value and opportunities to engage deeply with the chapters.

When facing philosophical and methodological struggles researchers can be stymied by the inaccessible and abstract nature of much that is written about research and being a researcher. By featuring vignettes and worked examples of research extracts throughout, Frost's thinking and ideas were clearly illuminated. This is likely to be both interesting and reassuring for those new to considering and questioning ideas about reflexivity and self.

A further beneficial feature included covering not only the sole researcher, but how to tackle research as a team member. The dynamics of team working can often be overlooked in research texts, and this addition added great utility. Similarly, the discussion about the challenges of working with mixed methodologies was expertly handled and is an aspect of social science research, which has currency.

However, most interesting of all was the way in which Frost characterised researchers by worldview rather than by methodological preferences. Eschewing the oft cited nomenclature of researchers being quantitative or qualitative, Frost's use of objective and subjective (respectively) revealed much about her own worldview and signalled how the researcher, rather than the method, must be considered and their position must be rigorously interrogated and stated before methodological issues can be attended to.

With interpretative methodological turns looking increasingly towards researching human experience and practice, this book and its deep exploration of the role of researcher, is timely. Academically robust yet accessible and digestible, the worked examples and clear yet personal writing style make this book an invaluable addition to any social science researchers collection.