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Abstract

Hemingway's Boat: Everything He Loved and Lost, 1934-1961 (2011) by Paul Hendrickson is an excellent example of a dual-purpose book for qualitative researchers. It first provides an example of high-quality scholarship in the field of life history research. It also offers the reader specific insights into the practice of qualitative research and how that data is used to create a narrative of the participant's life. Through the use of authorial participation, a grounded narrative framework, and a detailed description of his research process, Hendrickson's book is a keen exemplar of the process and product of qualitative work.

Keywords

Hemingway, Qualitative Research, Biography, Life History

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Biography as Pedagogy: A Review of *Hemingway's Boat: Everything He Loved and Lost, 1934-1961*

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Hemingway's Boat: Everything He Loved and Lost, 1934-1961 (2011) by Paul Hendrickson is an excellent example of a dual-purpose book for qualitative researchers. It firsts provides an example of high-quality scholarship in the field of life history research. It also offers the reader specific insights into the practice of qualitative research and how that data is used to create a narrative of the participant's life. Through the use of authorial participation, a grounded narrative framework, and a detailed description of his research process, Hendrickson's book is a keen exemplar of the process and product of qualitative work. Key Words: Hemingway, Qualitative Research, Biography, Life History.

It is a fine time to be a qualitative researcher. With the paradigm wars squarely in the rear-view mirror of research, it is possible now to focus on the search for meaning that Gage (1989) suggests can be found through the "kind of insight that historians, moral philosophers, novelists, artists, and literary critics can provide" (p. 4). This shift to derive insight from lived experiences is nowhere more evident than in the tools available to the qualitative researcher. A quick search of a popular online book vendor resulted in over 1400 hits using the keyword search, "qualitative research." And though not every query result was a guidebook or conceptual how-to manual, most were. *The Qualitative Report* itself has featured numerous recent book reviews; each providing eager readers with more options for their research libraries.

There is also a need on that bookshelf however, for sterling examples of well-practiced and finely-written qualitative research. Paul Hendrickson's 2011 tome, *Hemingway's Boat: Everything He Loved and Lost, 1934-1961* is just such a text. Nominated for a 2012 National Book Critics Circle Award, *Hemingway's Boat* paints a rich portrait of the American literary icon, Ernest Hemingway, and his deep connection to the ocean, fishing, and his beloved boat, *The Pilar*. As a former literature and writing teacher I have read many books by and about Hemingway. What struck me about Hendrickson's book however was not the contribution it makes to the enormous oeuvre of Hemingway scholarship (though it most certainly does do that). Instead I was impressed by the elegance of the text as a useful model of narrative research (or more specifically, life-history research).

A strength of Hendrickson's work is found in his purposeful participation in the narrative itself. As Goodson and Sikes (2001) note: "it has become common practice for qualitative researchers to 'write themselves into' their research, on the grounds that personal, background information will enhance the rigor of their work by making potential biases explicit" (p. 35). This intentional authorial representation adds depth to the biographical narrative of Hemingway's life. "I wouldn't want it to be a story only

about *Pilar's* owner. And further, I'd want it to be far less a biography than an interpretation, an evocation, with other lives streaming in" (p. 472), Hendrickson writes. And since interpreting the data is the primary task of the qualitative researcher, Hendrickson's specific and intentional observations and reflections on the stories he has collected provide the qualitative researcher with a wealth of examples of the active role of the researcher. It is not simply a matter of reporting the "facts" as they may appear. For example, he demonstrates his authorial invention regarding what he believes was Hemingway's literary intent: "I think Hemingway himself would have conceded he was serving an experimental literary purpose more than a reportorial or documentary one" (p. 258). Hendrickson bases this belief on a myriad of sources, however what's important from a researcher's perspective is the notion of personal interaction with the research participant and making educated conjectures.

Hendrickson also offers a thorough example of how to anchor research around a grounded theme or framework. He centers his entire focus around Hemingway's relationship with his boat (and its corollary activities: the Gulf Stream and fishing): "I have been determined to try to anchor a Hemingway narrative, to ground it, in something that had existed in his world—that still exists, in its way—just as he had once existed in the world" (p. 14). Central to the practice of mining meaning from the data is to develop analytical strategies. Again Goodson & Sikes (2001) address this process of analysis by reminding us that it "usually involves fitting the evidence and information into a framework of some kind. This framework may take the form of classifications, categories, models, typologies, or concepts" (p. 34). Creswell's describes this process at the ability to "analyze the participants' stories, and then 'restory' them into a framework that makes sense" (p. 56).

For example, Hendrickson draws a parallel between Hemingway's famous prose style and his choice of a boat, suggesting that just like "the sentences that made him famous, the beauty of his boat is of the spare, clean, serviceable kind. She's been written, you could say, in the deceptively plain American idiom" (p. 138). I found his consistent use of the boat framework to be essential to my engagement as a reader and to my development as a qualitative researcher. It provides the reader with an almost behind-the-scenes look at how raw data (and thus the lived experiences of the research participant) can be shaped to provide meaning. This meaning becomes collaborative between Hendrickson and his readers, using the framework of the *Pilar* in order that he "might be able to begin to understand things about Hemingway, and not only Hemingway, in ways that [Hendrickson] had not previously been able to understand" (p. 14). While it is not possible to shape a universal meaning from any specific lived experience, the careful use of a thematic metaphor (actual or theoretical) can guide the reader into a shared understanding of the relationship between the researcher and the participant. What meaning is made from that is up to us.

I believe the most significant contribution that *Hemingway's Boat* can make to the field of qualitative research is found in Hendrickson's detailed description of his own research process. It was helpful to read the "how-to" section that Hendrickson titled "Essay On Sources" in the text. As opposed to simply listing a line-by-line citation of sources, he provides insight and editorial comments on his own process. He begins by carefully cataloguing the resources he used by revealing that the data came first from his own interviewing and reporting and then "from documents – letters, manuscripts, old

Pilar logs, photographs, newsreels, eight-millimeter films, tinny wire recordings converted to audio recordings” (p. 472). His final data-collection involved gathering information “from so-called secondary sources, which in many ways became primary” (p. 472). This post-narrative essay provides a succinct but helpful description for qualitative researchers, reminding us that even when the subject is no longer available for personal interviews, methods still exist to give an audience to the voices of the past.

Throughout the book, Hendrickson narrates his own research journey. He begins by relating a chance encounter he had with one of Hemingway’s sons years prior to writing *Hemingway’s Boat* and then expands upon this meeting by explaining chapter by chapter how his research came to fruition. And while he doesn’t bedevil the reader with descriptions of countless visits to Hemingway document repositories, he does indulge in specific examples of his interactions with research participants when they intersect the overall Hemingway narrative. This gives the reader a distinct participatory engagement with Hendrickson’s research. By narrating his encounter with sources (and source material), he offers a “ride-along” instructional experience for fellow qualitative researchers. By interjecting his personal research story within the larger story of Hemingway and his boat, Hendrickson also provides a specific example of successful presentation of research. And this presentation adds much value to the varied fields that practice qualitative research, especially education. As Kridel (2008) points out, we often “do not read enough accounts of biographical method in education drawn from the quite substantial body of literature from the humanities. There is much to explore, and many connections and applications are waiting to be made” (p. 7).

The art of biography inevitably involves a certain element of conjecture or fictive assumption on the part of the researcher. Hemingway himself said that what makes literature is “inventing truly from honestly acquired knowledge, so that what you make up is truer than what you might remember” (Hendrickson, 2011, p. 23). Hendrickson was up to the task to fill in the gaps of certain biographical “truths” and thus create a thick and varied depiction of Hemingway’s later career and his relationship (romance?) with his boat. For qualitative researchers, this book is an exemplar of a finished project that not only typifies the rigor of scholarly work, but that also serves as a “clean, well-lighted” guide of how to conduct that research.

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