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# Self-Reflection, Politics, Art, and Qualitative Research: A Review of Denzin and Lincoln's Third Edition of *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*

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## Self-Reflection, Politics, Art, and Qualitative Research: A Review of Denzin and Lincoln's Third Edition of *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*

### **Abstract**

The third edition of *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, illustrates the varied perspectives of twenty five experienced qualitative researchers focusing on collecting, analyzing, and interpreting empirical materials. New topics are introduced in this third edition capturing the dynamic nature and emerging trends in the field such as arts-based approaches. It is a great reference book and a resource of unlimited possibilities. It provides a window for further inquiry for beginners, intermediate and experienced qualitative researchers. Many of the chapters read as powerful essays provoking self-reflection, political involvement, activism, and alternate ways of looking at the world around us.

### **Keywords**

Qualitative Research, Research Methodology, Qualitative Methods

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**Self-Reflection, Politics, Art, and Qualitative Research:  
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*The third edition of *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, illustrates the varied perspectives of twenty five experienced qualitative researchers focusing on collecting, analyzing, and interpreting empirical materials. New topics are introduced in this third edition capturing the dynamic nature and emerging trends in the field such as arts-based approaches. It is a great reference book and a resource of unlimited possibilities. It provides a window for further inquiry for beginners, intermediate and experienced qualitative researchers. Many of the chapters read as powerful essays provoking self-reflection, political involvement, activism, and alternate ways of looking at the world around us. Key words: Qualitative Research, Research Methodology, and Qualitative Methods*

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In the last three decades the field of qualitative research has consolidated as a legitimate discipline for the inquiry of meaning. As a discipline, it has been strengthened by an explicit collective perspective on fundamental issues, including the “kinds of questions that are worth asking; the ways of answering questions that are legitimate; the constituent elements of evidence and the weighting of those elements; the appropriate role of the researcher; and, the ways in which results should be presented and used” (Devers, 1999, p. 1154). Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln’s (2008) third edition of *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials* illustrates the varied perspectives of its twenty-five main contributors, while portraying the collective fundamentals of the discipline. The handbook focuses on collecting, analyzing, and interpreting a wide variety of empirical materials from the point of view of experienced qualitative researchers. This paperback version is organized into two main parts preceded by an introduction by the editors while a series of special indexes and study features complement the book.

The book begins with an introductory chapter entitled, “The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research,” by Denzin and Lincoln. This chapter is very informative and provides a good overview of the discipline, its evolution, and its challenges. In the introduction, the editors also present the book to the reader and comment on the uniqueness and the unifying factors of the chapters that follow. After reading the opening remarks, the reader is able to approach the book understanding that “a complex, interconnected family of terms, concepts, and assumptions surround the term ‘qualitative research’” (p. 3). In each chapter thereafter the authors explore this complex world while providing practical advice on how to collect, interpret, and analyze qualitative data or materials. Eighteen chapters introduce the researcher to basic methods of gathering, analyzing, and interpreting qualitative empirical materials. The editors

argue that, “there is no single interpretative truth...there are multiple interpretative communities...the field of qualitative research is defined by a series of tensions, contradictions and hesitations” (p. 35).

The chapters are organized in two parts. Each part is introduced by the editors. The main features of each of the chapters are summarized. This is a helpful feature of the book. It allows the readers to identify the chapters that match their interest. Part I, entitled *Methods of Collecting and Analyzing Empirical Materials*, the editors frame the chapter to follow by stating that, “The socially situated researcher creates, through interaction and material practices, those realities and representations that are the subject matter of inquiry” (p. 45). The interpretation is closely linked to such sites and locations. Part I contains chapters focusing on different types of inquiries (e.g., narrative and arts-based) and different data collection and generation approaches (e.g., interviewing, observing, and audio and video recordings).

Part II entitled: “The Art and Practices of Interpretation, Evaluation, and Representation” include the chapters on the politics and practicalities of interpretation and emerging forms of representing qualitative research findings such as poetry. The editors offer that this section of the book, “explores the art, practices, and politics of interpretations, evaluation, and representations”. Furthermore they state that the “that processes that define the practices of interpretation and representation are always ongoing, emergent, unpredictable and unfinished” (p. 403). This is clearly illustrated in this part of the book.

It should be noted that the titles of the chapters as well as their content continuously evoke the humanistic nature of qualitative research. Many of the titles use words that bring to mind the multiple focal points, approaches and voices that characterize qualitative inquiry. The artistic, sensory, cultural and subjective features are present in many of the chapters focusing in the collection, and analyzing, interpreting, evaluating and representing data. Chapters such as “Poetics for a Planet,” “Aria in Time of War: Investigative Poetry and the Politics of Witnessing,” “What's New Visually?” and “Arts-Based Inquiry: Performing Revolutionary Pedagogy” among others, present qualitative methods as the convergence of art and practice.

Some of the chapters provide valuable overviews and historical perspectives about the methodology discussed. Furthermore they discuss different ways of approaching the same methodology. These chapters are especially helpful for the researchers interested in the evolution of these research genres. They also provide a good sense of the dynamism of the field. Highlights of this multiple perspective approach include the chapters related to narrative inquiry (Chapter 2), arts-based inquiries (Chapter 3), observation (Chapter 5) and autoethnography (Chapter 7).

From my perspective as a researcher in the fields of education and health and considering my experience in qualitative research, I was fascinated and at times overwhelmed with the diversity of topics and approaches presented by the contributors. Collectively, they provide me with some standards and criteria to be able to read and critique the qualitative literature that I am encountering in the health field. Qualitative research in health has experienced a growing interest. However most of us are trained in a positivistic tradition and even research labeled “qualitative” do not show the essential elements of the quest for meaning that characterizes qualitative research (Meyrick, 2006; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). This book gave me, not only the fundamentals for a shift in

paradigm, but also the examples and tools to move forward to the more practical aspects of conducting qualitative research, especially for the interpretation stages. Some chapters pleasantly surprised me with possibilities that I had not previously encountered or contemplated as a way of making sense and finding meaning in complex social environment in which I work, like the use photography and art-based inquiry.

I found especially interesting themes such as ethics, power, advocacy and politics cut across many of the articles. Many of them read as powerful essays provoking self-reflection, political involvement, activism and alternate ways of looking at the world around us. In some of them we find invitation to interpret qualitative data from a perspective free of conventionalisms. We are constantly invited to rethink why we are doing research and to frame ethical and moral conduct of research beyond institutional lines while focusing in the human being as the center of inquiry. Denzin, in Chapter 14, presents us with a model for a “radical ethical path” that transcends institutional review boards by paying close attention to the “problems associated with betrayal, deception and harm” (p.4 63). The model focuses on the personal responsibility of the researcher placing empathy, caring, emotion, and individual expression in the center in order to “align the ethics of the research with a politics of the oppressed, with a politics of resistance, hope and freedom” (p. 463). The essence of this position permeates throughout the book.

As compared to the previous edition (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003), it should be noted there is a great number of the contributors are different in the 2008 edition. New topics are also introduced in this third edition capturing the dynamic nature and emerging trends in the field. As a consequence, the second edition still maintains its relevance as a resource book for the intended audience. Denzin and Lincoln's third edition of the book offers a series of features that makes it an excellent source of information for beginners and intermediate level qualitative researchers such as a reader' guide, an abbreviated glossary of terms, and a list of recommended readings. I also want to highlight the reader's guide as a very useful feature of the third edition. It can be used by the reader to navigate through the book by cross referencing chapters, methodologies, and theories. It also summarizes the methodology discussed, its main approach, the primary topics, and other thematic topics included within the chapters. The one page guide is a snapshot of the attempt of the book to be as inclusive and comprehensive as possible.

In summary, this is a book that needs to be in the shelf of every qualitative researcher. Beyond being an excellent reference book, it is also a great resource of unlimited possibilities providing a window for further inquiry for beginners, intermediate and the more experienced researchers.

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### **Author Note**

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