

Book Review – Basics of Qualitative Research

Basics of Qualitative Research by Juliet Corbin is an overview of qualitative research using “Grounded Theory” as developed by Anselm Strauss. It describes qualitative research as “making the researcher as much a part of the research process as the participants and the data they provide.”(4) Rather than quantitative research, which strives for objectivity and uses primarily mathematical analysis of quantifiable data, qualitative research explores inner experiences, investigates meanings, and takes a holistic approach to phenomena. Grounded Theory is a key qualitative research method.

Consistent with other ethnography texts, Corbin then describes the research question, the literature review, data gathering methods, and other practical issues. She notes techniques for analyzing data, including asking questions, comparison and contrast, looking at the actual language used and considering the emotions behind the words. The last point often goes unheeded, but there is a huge difference “the police moved into the house” spoken by a calm city spokesman and “the police moved into the house” yelled by a mourning mother whose son was killed in his room by a neighborhood gang.

Taking the original text provided by the respondent, the researcher makes memos describing the context and his or her reactions to what is being said. He also tries to diagram the concepts captured by the testimony. Research journals record what happened during the day and how the researcher felt about it. Once the memos are written, investigators sort them by content, subject, and type. Quantitative studies use random sampling, but qualitative studies involving grounded theory sample as deeply and as widely as needed to completely explore whatever concepts and theories are developing from the information gathered.

One excellent recommendation of Corbin’s was to consider the individual subject with respect to the local, regional, national and international environments. That is, to consider the context of the subjects. People are not autonomous players; they exist and move in a complex framework of rules, expectations, and other factors. Homeless people are homeless in part because of their choices but in part because of their circumstances. The same is true to the rich and powerful. The Sessler Branden Advocacy Matrix was especially interesting.(170)

Researchers will develop many themes during their research and will want to harmonize them, seeing how they fit together in a comprehensive world view. Modern computerized qualitative data analysis programs can help investigators identify themes and align them. Corbin’s example, describing grounded theory data analysis for the Vietnam War, was worthwhile.

Investigators generally package their findings into a written product such as a thesis, book or dissertation to present their findings to the outside world. Ways to tell if a research project was well done include checking its validity, reliability, credibility, truthfulness, and rigor.

In summary, *Basics of Qualitative Research* is useful for beginning ethnographers and had some strong points. Its language is academic and even obtuse, and its bias liberal. Nonetheless, it is worth reading for people engaged in qualitative research.