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Qualitative research in action: A Canadian primer. (4th ed.).
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BOOK REVIEW

van den Hoonaard, D. K., & van den Scott, L.-J. (2022). *Qualitative research in action: A Canadian primer*. (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.

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The fourth edition of *Qualitative Research in Action: A Canadian Primer* is an accessible, engaging and practical text, ideally suited to its intended audience of undergraduate students with no previous experience conducting qualitative research. This edition is a family effort, with van den Hoonaard joined by her daughter as a co-author, and her husband as a guest author for Chapter 4.

There are ten chapters in this book, as well as a preface, three appendices, a glossary, references (organized by chapter), and an index. With the exception of the shorter first chapter, each chapter spans between 20-25 pages. At the beginning of each chapter, the authors provide three to five learning objectives, which could be used to check for understanding either by instructors in class, or by students working independently outside of class. The student-friendly approach is evident again at the end of each chapter in the 'Questions for Critical Thought' and Exercises (both independent and in-class), as well as in the suggestions for further reading and useful websites. In Chapters 2-10, key terms are indicated in bold font, which align with the List of Key Terms provided at the end of the chapter. The authors use text boxes to single out important information or advice; for example, a Sample Interview Guide is provided in Box 6.2 (pp. 118-119) and a Sample Focus-Group Introduction is offered in Box 7.4 (p. 142).

The book is organized into three main sections. In the first section, comprised of Chapters 1-4, the authors offer a broad introduction to qualitative research. In Chapter 1, they argue that qualitative research methods are powerful, because, unlike quantitative methods, "they allow the studied people to define what is central and important in *their* experience" (p. 3; italics in the original). This introductory chapter features a helpful Content Overview, with brief descriptions of the focal points of the upcoming chapters. Chapter 2 offers a detailed, if somewhat dense, discussion of the importance of asking questions and identifying goals in qualitative research. In their discussion of why modern researchers might adopt qualitative methods, the authors devote considerable attention to symbolic interactionism, first developed by Blumer (1969) and revealed later in the text as the authors' preferred

approach to data analysis, focusing on the influence of questions of meaning. Using symbolic interactionists as an illustrative example, van den Hoonaard and van den Scott also examine researcher assumptions, asserting that “the questions behind qualitative research are motivated by a researcher’s assumption that research should shed light on people’s lived experiences” (p. 30).

Part of Chapter 3 explores the forces that might motivate qualitative researchers. Van den Hoonaard and van den Scott illustrate the third motivating force, “involving participants in the design of the research in an attempt to more fully address issues of social justice and oppression” (p. 38), with some description of Participatory Action Research (PAR), offering the key characteristics of PAR in Box 3.2 (p. 39). Their discussion features Dickson’s (2000) study of older Indigenous women, in which the participants wanted the research to focus more on their strengths than on their problems, as “an example of what PAR can accomplish” (p. 40). The authors conclude that PAR “works to both inform and inspire change across society and reports data in ways that encourage action from the bottom up, as well as top-level policy action informed by the grassroots level” (p. 40), all of which may prove to be practical career advice for the intended audience.

Chapter 4 focuses on the ethical dimensions of qualitative research and is contributed by Will C. van den Hoonaard, described by the authors as “one of Canada’s foremost writers on research ethics and research ethics review” (p. 7). The guest author identifies three principles of ethical research, as outlined in Canada’s *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*: respect for persons, concern for human welfare, and justice (p. 56), each of which are defined in Box 4.1 (p. 57). The bulk of the chapter (pp. 60-71) offers practical advice about applying ethical principles to all stages of the qualitative research process. Included is a brief discussion of covert field research, described as “imply[ing] the need for protection from danger, both for the individuals under study and for the researcher” (p. 67). The chapter concludes with some consideration of how to act ethically in the digital age.

Chapters 5-8 comprise the second section of *Qualitative Research in Action: A Canadian Primer*. Here, the authors provide a detailed discussion of various methods of data collection in qualitative research, one at a time, although they are careful to note earlier in the text that “it is quite common for researchers to combine various methods in their work” (p. 10). In Chapter 5, van den Hoonaard and van den Scott explore the origins and nature of field research, providing a chronological overview similar to that seen in Chapters 2 and 3. The authors’ primary focus is advising readers on how to conduct all stages of fieldwork, from preparing to enter the field, to gaining access, entering the field, gaining trust, making observations, taking field notes, and leaving the field. They conclude with a brief consideration, titled “Innovations in Virtual Ethnography” (pp. 99-101), in which they argue that virtual ethnography “requires the same labour-intensive, systematic approach as all qualitative research” (p. 99).

Chapters 6 and 7 offer a guided tour of two additional methods of qualitative data collection: in-depth interviewing and focus groups. Van den Hoonaard and van den Scott begin Chapter

6 by distinguishing between standardized interviews and in-depth interviews, noting the limitations of the first approach and highlighting feminist critiques of it in Box 6.1 (pp. 106-107). They argue that the in-depth interview is “an interactional process” (p. 112), in which the interviewer considers not only what is said, but also how it is said. The rest of the chapter guides the reader through every step of the interview process, from strategies for identifying participants to designing an interview guide, conducting the interview, and transcribing the interview. In the section “Innovations in Interviewing” (pp. 123-126), the authors consider online interviewing and photo elicitation.

In Chapter 7, van den Hoonaard and van den Scott instruct readers to use focus groups “when you are interested in learning about how people understand things that occur in their everyday lives or that they have thought about” (p. 132), further adding that this method “may also be useful for topics that participants care deeply about and may find hard to talk about in individual interviews” (p. 132). The authors break down the process of planning for a focus group (pp. 134-139) and then, drawing primarily on the work of Litosseliti (2003), walk readers step-by-step through running a focus-group session, dividing it up into the four stages of forming, norming, performing and adjourning.

For Chapter 8, van den Hoonaard and van den Scott adopt a different approach: rather than providing a step-by-step guide for conducting unobtrusive research, they offer numerous examples drawn from a wide variety of sources, simply “to indicate a range of possibilities” (p. 150). They contrast manifest content, which is “easily observed and immediately evident” (p.150) with latent content, which provides “implicit meanings” (p. 150) that must be uncovered by the researcher. In the rest of the chapter, they explore how to analyze pre-existing documents, documents of social institutions, media content, and physical objects. The section at the end of the chapter, entitled “Innovations in Research” (pp. 164-169), with its focus on internet research, reflects the authors’ attempt to make this fourth edition current and relevant to the intended audience.

The third and final section of *Qualitative Research in Action: A Canadian Primer* consists of Chapters 9 and 10, in which van den Hoonaard and van den Scott discuss how to analyze qualitative data and write research reports. The key message here is to trust in and follow the *processes* of analysis and writing. In Chapter 9, the authors choose not to discuss software packages available for qualitative data analysis, explaining to readers that such tools “do not do the conceptual work for you” (p. 174) and that, in using them, “you may cut off options too early in the process and lose some of the flexibility that is the strength of qualitative research” (p. 174). This commentary resonates with my own experience as a qualitative researcher and aligns with the advice I would give to my students. In the substantial section of Chapter 9 entitled “Coding Interview Transcripts and Field Notes” (pp. 176-187), the authors emphasize the recursive nature of the coding process, reminding readers to keep in mind the ultimate goal of “understand[ing] the participant’s situation from their point of view” (p. 179). In the last chapter of the book, the authors advise readers on how to write the different sections of a research report, exploring them in the order in which they recommend writing them: Findings, Literature Review, Methods, Conclusion and Introduction. This chapter also includes a discussion of writing style, some editing tips, and

advice on how to avoid plagiarism. The final section of Chapter 10 (p. 214-216) explores autoethnography and ethnodrama as innovative approaches to presenting qualitative research.

A particular strength of this fourth edition is the authors' use of a wealth of illustrative examples from a wide variety of studies, with an emphasis on those conducted by Canadian researchers. In the preface, van den Hoonaard and van den Scott characterize the text as "unabashedly Canadian" (p. viii) and this quality is seen at many points throughout the text. In Chapter 5, after taking readers back to Herbert Brown Ames' study of a working-class neighbourhood in Montreal in the late 19th century to witness the beginnings of ethnography in Canada, van den Hoonaard and van den Scott then outline the contributions of many other Canadian scholars, including numerous French-language researchers, Carl Dawson, Everett C. Hughes, William Shaffir, and those associated with Memorial University's Institute for Social and Economic Research (pp. 81-83). At many points, the authors draw on their own experiences and published work. Van den Hoonaard's studies of widows and widowers are often referenced, as seen in Chapters 1, 6, 9 and 10, and her field notes from a study of wetlands are offered as a sample in Appendix B (pp. 223-225). Van den Scott's research in Indigenous communities is referred to frequently as well, such as in the discussion of Indigenous researchers' criticism of standardized interviews offered in Chapter 6 (p. 108). Although some might criticize the authors' heavy reliance on their own work, their diverse experiences as researchers not only relate directly to the subject of the book, but also establish their credibility with readers. Overall, the emphasis on Canadian examples will be a welcome change for any instructors who, like me, have had to track down such studies on their own in order to supplement other texts about research methods.

Another impressive quality of this book is how attuned van den Hoonaard and van den Scott are to the unique nature of conducting research with Indigenous participants and sharing that research. In Chapter 3, they offer this caution to readers who are considering conducting research studies with Indigenous peoples: "it is necessary to consider how open you are to an attitude of learning and to appreciating Indigenous world views" (p. 48). In the section of Chapter 5 that focuses on establishing relationships with gatekeepers, van den Hoonaard and van den Scott note that "[i]n Indigenous communities or settings, the community is the gatekeeper" (p. 88). In Chapter 6, they not only consider Indigenous researchers' criticism of standardized interviews (p. 108), but also highlight the potential of photovoice in Indigenous research in Box 6.3 (pp. 125-126). Their description of focus groups in Chapter 7 includes some discussion (pp. 133-134) of why talking circles might be a more appropriate strategy when working with Indigenous communities, and Chapter 10 includes two recent examples of studies to illustrate how to report appropriately on research with Indigenous communities. By introducing readers to Indigenous research methodologies, key principles for conducting research with Indigenous communities, and recent studies done with such communities, van den Hoonaard and van den Scott make this fourth edition stand out among other texts about research methods.

One final characteristic that makes this text particularly suitable for its intended audience is the authors' conversational, direct and encouraging tone, supported by consistent use of the

2nd-person voice. Van den Hoonaard and van den Scott tell readers at the beginning of Chapter 1, “This text is designed to help you think like a qualitative researcher” (p. 6), and at the end of the same chapter, they say “we encourage you to turn to the end-of-chapter suggested readings and look for a study that tickles your fancy” (p. 10). In their discussion of unobtrusive research in Chapter 8, van den Hoonaard and van den Scott note that such research “can be a good place for new researchers, such as students like you, to get their feet wet” (p. 149). They conclude Chapter 10 with this encouraging imperative command: “Go forth and write!” (p. 217).

Van den Hoonaard and van den Scott tell us in the Preface that they aim to pass on “the bug of doing qualitative research” (p. viii); with its logical organization, wide range of illustrative examples, countless practical tips, and conversational style, the fourth edition of *Qualitative Research in Action: A Canadian Primer* is sure to do just that, informing and inspiring undergraduate students - or even senior secondary students - as they learn to become qualitative researchers.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE:

Jaime Malic holds a PhD in Educational Leadership and Policy from OISE in the University of Toronto; her qualitative dissertation research focused on leadership values and practices in independent schools. She is an experienced educator with a passion for research and teaching, both of which she is fortunate to pursue at St. Clement's School in Toronto, where she teaches the courses of the Advanced Placement Capstone Program and leads a longitudinal qualitative research study for the school about the perceived preparedness of its recent graduates.
