



*Book Review*

## Five Master Classes in Qualitative Analysis

Frederick J. Wertz, Kathy Charmaz, Linda M. McMullen, Ruthellen Josselson, Rosemarie Anderson, and Emalinda McSpadden. (2011). *Five ways of doing qualitative analysis*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.  
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by **Peter Ashworth**

### The vulnerabilities on which the book rests

This is a courageous book, and its success is due precisely to the openness and audacity of its authors. Surely the six writers had remarkable trust in each other, and especially in Dr Wertz, who seems to have initiated and chaired the enterprise. In the face of the real possibility of hostility, five authoritative methodologists have taken the same set of qualitative material and analysed it in their own way. Most significantly, they have each provided a detailed account of their workings in conducting their analysis. They have laid all of this bare to the other authors as well as to Emily McSpadden, the originator of the data. Perhaps even more courageously, Emily has allowed her harrowing experience to be the focus of attention of the five expert psychologists and of the readers. Emily has also written her own commentary on the five analyses, and the authors of these analyses have provided their reactions (which are remarkably lacking in defensiveness).

The core of the book, then, is a written protocol by, and interview with, 'Teresa' (the pseudonym was later abandoned the request of Emily McSpadden as she became increasingly involved in the research program that led to the book). The protocol originated as Emily's section of a class exercise in which students were asked to write about their experience of a serious personal misfortune. This protocol formed the basis for an interview that was conducted by a fellow-student.

The protocol and the interview provide exceptional

material. The personal misfortune Emily described in her protocol involves the destruction of her very promising operatic career (described in the book as: "It was my calling, it was me ... I was actually pretty good" p. 114) by an extraordinarily aggressive thyroid cancer. She then described her subsequent immersion in a new lifeworld and her reconstruction of selfhood. There is bravery in the very process of recounting this story.

### The question of these five ways

The five analyses of Emily's material presented in the book are intended to demonstrate the distinct approaches of:

- Phenomenological psychology (Fred Wertz);
- Constructivist grounded theory (Kathy Charmaz);
- Social psychological discourse analysis (Linda M. McMullen);
- Narrative psychology (Ruthellen Josselson); and
- Intuitive inquiry (Rosemarie Anderson).

I was unaware of intuitive inquiry as a method of inquiry, but the four other methods included in *Five Ways* are surely central to current qualitative psychology. I believe that there are significant distinctions within some of these four methods that would have benefitted from further discussion. However, I recognize only too well that there are practical problems precluding the representation of

too many varieties of qualitative method in the analyses.

In European texts of qualitative research interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is certainly distinguished from phenomenological psychology and given separate treatment (anticipating recent discussion which underlines the distinction between these approaches see Giorgi, 2009, 2010, 2011; Smith, 2010; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). It may well be that IPA is less well-known in North America. The significant variants of discourse analysis, in particular conversation analysis and critical or Foucauldian, discourse analysis (Parker, 2002), also deserve some discussion. Indeed these variants are usually given separate attention in most textbooks (although Willig, 2008, does not treat conversation analysis separately). Grounded theory is widely regarded as consisting of a very flexible set of analytical tools. Its status as a methodology thus depends on the further ontological and epistemological commitments of a particular scientist (in Dr Charmaz's work, the commitments are to constructivism). This again may deserve some discussion.

To summarise, although I concur with the ways of doing qualitative analysis that have been selected for treatment in this book I would ideally have liked some acknowledgement of the variants mentioned above. It could well be that knowledge of the target market influenced the decision not to muddy the analytical waters. In addition, practicalities may not have allowed the space necessary for additional, separate analyses of the Emily material.

### The five analyses

The accounts of the five kinds of analysis are extremely interesting. These accounts are discussed in more detail in the paragraphs below.

Dr Fred Wertz based his phenomenological approach on the Husserlian/Merleau-Pontian thinking of Amedeo Giorgi (2009). He is extraordinarily gifted in his ability to see illuminating meanings in the material. Emily herself commented, admiringly, "While, in my view, the researcher understood what I was trying to say and accurately depicted the meaning of my experience (from my standpoint), it seems unbelievable that one should be able to do so in such depth and degree" (p. 349). It seems that Emily recognised the phenomenological attempt to capture the first-person experience, apparently feeling that in the analysis Dr Wertz was able to bring out the features of the experience in an especially vivid way.

The major aim of Dr Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory approach was to "discover a

fundamental social or social psychological process about which to theorize" (p 176). This resulted in her describing Emily's experience fundamentally as losing and regaining a valued self. A number of features of the specific experience were brought out nicely. For example, the process of receiving bad news has its own characteristics, but the necessity of somehow conveying the news to others results in the news gaining significance for Emily herself.

In discourse analytic research the commitment is to discourse as ontologically prior in some sense. Within this form of analysis discourse is treated as the most 'fundamentally real' level of social life. Dr McMullen's analysis focused on the use of language in presenting a resilient self in the face of Emily's misfortune. This resulted in Emily's rhetoric being characterised as 'enhancing oneself, diminishing others'. Not surprisingly, Emily regretted the shadow of moral dubiousness that this characterisation seems to cast on her account and insisted: "The absence of others' actions was evident in my data because those actions were also absent from my experience. The analysis seems to claim, instead, that I exaggerated the smallness of others' roles, and that they were actually greater than I admitted in my interview" (p. 346). To some extent this comment rests on a misunderstanding of the aim of discourse analysis, and it is salutary that readers are able to recognize this and make plain in their own discourse analyses the precise focus of discourse analytic research.

Narrative psychology brings out the storied nature of human conduct, and so the particular kind of analysis Dr Josselson was called upon to conduct on the Emily data develops the material as having the elements of a story. The analysis detects the themes of the story and highlights the ways in which the persons (especially the narrator) are characterised: I want to be seen as strong. There are recognised overlaps with discourse analysis, and Emily's response is somewhat similar in that she wanted the account to be understood to be a report of her actual life not merely a narrative.

Dr Anderson's intuitive inquiry method (see Anderson, 2006) was unfamiliar to me. However, we are told that:

Intuitive inquiry joins intuition to intellectual rigor in a hermeneutical process of interpretation intended for the study of subtle human experiences. (Anderson, 2006)

Least constrained in method of the five methodologies demonstrated in the book, it seems that intuitive inquiry allows for an unlimited range of personal resources to be brought to bear on the elaborative construal of the data. For qualitative researchers such as myself, whose original schooling

was in the imaginatively restrictive discipline of experimental psychology, such licence can be very liberating. However, questions might arise concerning the defence of the approach epistemologically.

Dr Anderson's reading led to the claim of a remarkable underlying theme of the experience, 'reverse mirroring'. This term is used in various ways in the literature and Dr Anderson does not define it explicitly. However, it clearly means that Emily's thinking and behaviour somehow reflect or respond to the nature of the illness itself. For example, Emily's decisive adoption as part of a resilient persona of a 'logical' and 'sensible' stance, one which is free of the vagaries of emotion, counters and thereby 'mirrors in reverse' the angry cancer.

### **Do the conditions of the analyses show each method to its best advantage?**

The analyses are very painstaking and each of the analysts is a master of their craft. The fact that the focus was on one protocol and interview led to inevitable limitations (for example, grounded theory normally iterates dramatically between a number of accounts). However, given this constraint, the emerging studies were thorough indeed.

Dr Wertz's phenomenological psychology led to a detailed description of Emily's personal history, the destruction of one identity and the constitution of another. This is done extraordinarily well (Emily says, in wonder, "How could such detail be developed from my brief account?" p. 348). The move in phenomenological psychology (as I see it) towards illuminating the individual case by describing it throughout in terms of the first-person lifeworld might have been achieved with a somewhat different interview. (Indeed, each of the analysts of this book would probably have liked to conduct their own subtly different kind of interview.) However, the essence or the conditions of possibility, of living through profound and personally destructive misfortune, in which resilience seems at least to be one mode, was brought out in the individual structure developed by Dr Wertz.

The constructivist grounded theory approach was, as I have indicated, hampered somewhat by the nature of the material. In describing her analysis Dr Charmaz indicates that grounded theory usually investigates hunches by selecting new sources of data and addressing further questions to the data. This involves the use of the technique of constant comparison, as well as the whole panoply of grounded theory skills on an array of data. Nevertheless, Dr Charmaz provides a worthwhile general descriptive theme.

Dr McMullen's attempt at discourse analysis with this

limited data did place her at a bit of a disadvantage. Nevertheless, her study shows the way in which such work moves to the delineation of the forms of socially-available discourse that members of the society could draw on for use in certain defined circumstances. The same is true for Dr Josselson's unpicking of Emily's narrative: One can see how Emily chose to position herself in the story of her misfortune.

### **The ethics of revealing Emily McSpadden's authorship**

The main ethical issue raised by the study is the way in which the anonymity of the author of the key protocol and transcript was discarded. Should Teresa have remained Teresa instead of being abandoned in favour of Emily? This had plainly been a matter of intense discussion among the project team, and had entailed wide consultation with experts in the area of ethics. I would not presume to come to a different conclusion. Emily did make stark judgements regarding her parents and others. It is possible that these people may be impacted by seeing themselves as Emily saw them. However, I have no doubt that this was properly borne in mind.

### **Differences of an essential kind between qualitative methods**

Because the five analyses are all carried out on the same material and are treated as somehow equivalent (such that Dr Wertz is able to provide a synthesis of findings at the end of the book), it is important that the choice of methods should not appear to the student to be arbitrary and to be guided by unconstrained personal preference. The methods do have very different commitments concerning the image of psychological life that they take to be a basis for qualitative research. For example, phenomenology invites us to think of the person as a perceiver.

All forms of conscious experience are, in one way or another, founded on perceptual and sensory consciousness. In general terms, Husserl contrasts the 'self-givenness' of perception with a very large class of forms of consciousness that are 'representational', or which work through a modification of presencing. Husserl terms this 'presentification', 'presentation' or 'calling to mind' (not just in memory, but in fantasy as well as wishing.). When we remember, imagine or fantasize about an object, we do not have precisely the same sense of immediate, actual, bodily and temporal presence of the object. Moran (2005) described this as follows:

Perception is not a construction or representation but is direct access to the experienced object. (pp. 166-67; Incidentally, this would be my own position.)

Some of the approaches that contrast with phenomenological psychology do not see the person as a perceiver, but instead view him or her as a conceiver or a constructor. Such research focuses more on an individual's construction of their lifeworld than on their perception of this lifeworld. Indeed, approaches such as discourse analysis and narrative psychology go so far as to suggest that the prime reality may not even be the person as construer, but the materials that are at hand to perform that construction, the socially available discourse or narrative forms.

Thus, Heidegger advanced the view that experience does not 'presence' the world directly, but that presencing is an act of interpretation in which language use is fundamental. Language was once called the 'house of being.' It is the guardian of presencing, inasmuch as the latter's radiance remains entrusted to the propriative showing of the saying. Language is the house of Being because, as the saying, it is appropriation's mode (Heidegger, 1957/1993, p. 424). I read this statement of Heidegger's as meaning that anything that we can say 'is' has linguistic form. It is language that, in this sense, 'houses' it. The ontology here (which is also the ontology of Wittgenstein, 1953) does not give primacy to the perceiving person but to the discourse of the culture. This points to narrative psychology and

discursive analysis as appropriate methods of qualitative research (for discussion, see Ashworth, 2007).

The differences between the collectivist, discursive viewpoint and that of phenomenological psychology are profound. The methods demonstrated in *Five Ways* embody a radical distinction in ontology.

### Readership and usefulness

This book is an extraordinarily valuable contribution to qualitative research pedagogy. The style of the book draws the reader into the material and makes the reader want to do some analysis of it oneself. Although it could be that an instructor might see it as appropriate to use this text in introducing the range of approaches to qualitative method, my own preference might be to regard it as a 'second stage' text. In this way the book could be used to provide master classes in textual analysis for students who already have some acquaintance with a few of the approaches dealt with in the book. These students should also have some basic experience of analysing data themselves. I have already recommended it to some of my own students who are in this position.

### Referencing Format

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