

THIRD
EDITION

Becoming

QUALITATIVE
RESEARCHERS

AN INTRODUCTION

CORRINE GLESNE

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Becoming Qualitative Researchers

An Introduction

Corrine Glesne



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INTRODUCTION: A SENSE OF THINGS TO COME

“What all can be involved in updating a textbook?” my non-academic friends ask me. “Can’t you put in a few recent sources, talk about how technology has changed, add a couple new ideas, and be done with it? Besides, how much can research methods change in five years?”

I reply that the situation is a bit more intricate. Methodological perspectives do change, particularly in qualitative research, an approach noted for its variety and complexity with no discrete steps as a recipe to follow. That I have new experiences and meet people whose ideas engage and influence mine confounds matters in that the last edition is not the text I would write now. A new edition is a map to an author’s intellectual journey. In preparing this edition, I had to make sense of that journey in light of what it is that I believe and want to communicate regarding the practice of qualitative inquiry.

I’ve spent much of my time since the last edition in countries other than the United States, interacting with scholars, activists, community members, and students. This text reflects some of the ways in which these experiences have influenced my thinking on qualitative research. Qualitative methodologists, in general, currently give attention to issues such as reflexivity, the dynamics of power in research relationships, and other items that feminist and indigenous scholars have been at the forefront of raising. This text reflects these movements as well. I have traveled further along the trajectory I acknowledged in the last edition in that I continue to be partial to inquiry approaches that involve research participants more fully in the work, particularly in identifying the overarching research question and, thereby, in designing research that will be useful to the people who are involved. Nonetheless, I continue to believe that much is to be learned from traditional qualitative methods, that you can learn and practice the basics and then adapt them as your skills and inclinations lead. This book, therefore, is meant to continue as an introductory text to traditional qualitative research techniques of data collection, analysis, and writing. Along the way, however, I have added sections that are meant to probe deeper into and complicate some of these traditional practices.

Chapters tend to compartmentalize thoughts, giving the impression that data collection, for example, is distinct from data analysis. Although the activities of qualitative inquiry tend to be ongoing and overlapping, I use chapters to focus upon one research aspect at a time. My guiding principle throughout these pages has been to create a book I would want to use as a primary text to help you begin to conduct qualitative research. The book therefore guides you through the research process, with separate chapters on research design (Chapter 2), participant observation (Chapter 3), interviewing (Chapter 4), data analysis (Chapter 7), and writing (Chapters 8 and 9). The chapters pose issues, questions, and quandaries with which my students and I have struggled. As students in my classes have noted, my most frequent answer to questions raised by qualitative inquiry is “It depends.” In class discussions and in this book, I provide no solutions, find no truths. My goal is to raise questions, thereby