Review and analysis:


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Creswell's book begins with a discussion of the history of modern qualitative research across all academic disciplines. Table 1.1 on page 6 serves as a "meta-analysis" of methods books for multiple disciplines to see what key methods the disciplines use. The chart does not include Lindlof and Taylor's *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*; however, the methods included in Lindlof and Taylor are included within other disciplines. Communication research in general, quantitative and qualitative, borrows its methods from social sciences and humanities research disciplines, primarily psychology, sociology, and anthropology. Therefore, it follows that the methods Creswell discusses are worthwhile for mass communication. As the title suggests, Creswell immediately addresses the five traditions of qualitative inquiry: Biography, Phenomenology, Grounded Theory, Ethnography, and Case Study. Creswell argues that these are the main methods of qualitative research, but I would argue that historical and legal research should have a place in this chart, as well, perhaps as traditions their own. Based on their textual nature, historical and legal inquiry belong among the qualitative traditions. In terms of mass communication research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study are most useful, as well as historical and legal, which should be included. The questions mass communicators ask in their research tend to understand a problem or event and try to place that event in the evolution of the problem or event over time. Therefore, biography, which seeks to understand an individual, is not always useful.

Creswell begins his second chapter by defining qualitative research as "an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting" (Creswell, 15). Is this a useful definition? Is this the definition that students would expect to see? He expands on the five classifications as the historian's biography, the psychologist's phenomenology, the sociologist's grounded theory, the anthropologist's ethnography, and the social studies style case study.

Creswell lists characteristics of a good qualitative study: 1. Employ rigorous data collection procedures; 2. Frame the study within the assumptions and characteristics of the qualitative approach; 3. Use a tradition of inquiry; 4. Begin with a single focus; 5. Include detail for methods, data collection, and analysis; 6. Write so the reader feels a part of the scene; 7. Present levels of abstraction in analysis; 8. Writing is clear and engaging. Creswell gives examples of the format for qualitative writing on pages 22-23, which are very clear. These characteristics are strong, but are not necessarily unique to mass communications, but rather should be used in all forms of social research, qualitative and quantitative. I feel like he should have also stressed the importance of theory here, either the use of theory or the development of it. I also feel like he should...
have better discussed how to set the scene for the research in the introduction; this is a
tenet of anthropological research, which typically focuses on the ethnography. The
strength of good writing in research compels one’s findings or argument in a way that
better reaches the audience.

In Chapter 3, Creswell uses vignettes of research from the five traditions and
discusses the situation for use of each method. Here, he makes a strong point for all
research: think of the question being asked by the research, and then find the method
that best answers that question.

Chapter 4 expands on the vignettes by examining the five traditions themselves.
A biographical study is the study of an individual and his or her experiences, as told
through documents and the subject. A phenomenological study describes the meaning
of lived experiences of several individuals, where research is conducted by searching
for themes in the data to solve the problem. The concept of phenomenology concerns
an occurrence, which is deemed a phenomenon, and how and why this occurrence has
changed the way society functions. Grounded theory studies attempt to create a theory
by examining a phenomenon to determine the who, what, when, where, why, and how
of that phenomenon. To answer those questions, the researcher gathers data through
interviews and field visits and then sorts that data based on multiple characteristics
called codes. The initial round of coding, called open coding, categorizes data into
broad groups with similarities; the second round, called axial coding, categorizes data
inside the open code groups into further similarities to find commonality along the
cases. The coding explanation on page 57 is useful for defining a methodology for a
study and can support a researcher’s process for collecting information and analyzing it.
An ethnography is a description and interpretation of a culture or social group; data is
collected through an immersive participant observation. In a case study, the researcher
uses evidence from a single event or group to understand the unit itself, and find
resonance among multiple cases.

Chapter 5 discusses the need for theory in qualitative study to understand the
data being collected, but advises that theory evolves over time. Social theory from
social sciences and humanities helps to explain phenomena about culture and society.
However, because the goal of qualitative inquiry is typically to develop theory to explain
a phenomenon, so the use of theory here is often a style of metatheory, in which the
tenets of ontology, epistemology, axiology, agency, and praxis. Creswell does not
address the concepts of metatheory well in the grounded theory section, and one doing
a grounded theory study would be well served to study the tenets of metatheory in a
grounded theory study. Further, when one attempts to build on an existing social theory,
one must truly understand the messages of those theories to properly attach the
grounded theory ideas gained from qualitative inquiry to bind the new findings to the
theoretical history.

Chapter 6 addresses writing a qualitative research paper. Creswell advises
writers to begin with a statement of a problem in society or knowledge. He follows by
suggesting a purpose statement, which explains why this study is important and what
theoretical questions it will answer. Page 96 gives a guide for constructing the statement
of purpose. Research questions should surround the problem, with one key question
leading the others. In good writing, the researcher will foreshadow the traditions, theory,
research setting, and findings in the introduction, so that the reader will be able to anticipate the flow of the paper.

Chapter 7 identifies ways in which data is collected. In biographical, phenomenological, and grounded theory studies, data is collected from artifacts and interviews. Ethnography draws data from participant observation. Case study uses a multitude of methods. The researcher must have access to the data, and a plan for how to collect and secure the data.

In chapter 8, Creswell turns to methods for data analysis. He discusses many coding schemes and the process by which data is extracted from interviews, field notes, documents, and artifacts and is categorized to answer the research questions. He addresses his five traditions again, and shows specific ways each tradition has for its data analysis. He discusses the computer program NUD-IST at length, which appears to be quite outdated as other technology, specifically Atlas.TI, has become the field standard for qualitative coding software. I like this sentence and you should try to write more like it.

Creswell focuses on the narrative writing style in chapter 9. He addresses the issues of audience, quotations, and the author's position in the research. The five traditions again have their own conventions, styles, and needs. Creswell notes that studies should cite literature relevant to the topic, the method, and the tradition to ensure that its message is clear. While he addresses the difference in thin description and thick description, he fails to cite Geertz, the anthropologist who heavily explicated the term. He does cite Geertz in the additional readings, however.

Lastly, Creswell addresses the need for validity in chapter 10. Researchers need to be aware of the common criticisms of qualitative inquiry and address those concerns in their narratives. The researcher must find ways to be a participant observer without disrupting the the natural setting of the scene; basically, the researcher should not alter the cultural situation during the research. Researchers must be careful not to let their personal judgments interfere with the data collection and analysis, which is easy to say but difficult to do; the researcher must continually to put away their views and observe the situation for what it is. This makes me think of anthropologists discussing someone "going native" in their research, which is to say being so immersed in the culture and data that they can no longer see it objectively.

In summary, this book gives a solid guideline for creating qualitative research. The researcher must adapt the methods described here for communication research, and further for visual research, but the methodology explained here will provide a valid and constructive framework for defining the boundaries and purpose of visual inquiry. The phenomenological method seems to work well for visual studies, and it explains cultural change. As visual studies turn to visual culture, a phenomenological approach would allow the researcher to encompass the problem from a total perspective to examine how societal movements influenced the visuals of culture. Grounded theory explores why certain visuals exist commonly among groups of people and tries to explain how the visual works for those groups. Ethnography understands how visuals work in society by examining the meaning of visuals with the users of them. Lastly, case study explores all of these and more.
In reading this book, I think it is an important book to understand the steps of inquiry for qualitative research, and to understand how mass communication methods are similar to those throughout the field. Specifically for visual communication, the book is useful as introductions to ethnography and grounded theory, as these are major qualitative methods used in visual communication work. However, this book’s broad scope does not contain all methods of visual inquiry, nor does it hint at them. A person studying visual communication research methods would do well to first read Creswell, and then follow with books specific to the discipline’s research.