

An Invitation to Qualitative Fieldwork

A Multilogical Approach

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Preface

What is there left to say about qualitative methods? Once seen as the realm of outlaws and bohemians, qualitative research is now an accepted and prominent feature of the academic landscape. Indeed, our own academic library lists hundreds of books about qualitative methodology. Do we really need another one?

We believe, yes, we really do. There is more to say, much more, precisely because so many scholars are now talking about qualitative research. The endeavor is growing rapidly and lushly, with a wide range of new cultivars, polymorphs, and off-shoots. Indeed, qualitative methods have become so diverse that it is easy to feel bewildered by its variety and overwhelmed by its increasingly detailed body of knowledge. Even experienced qualitative fieldworkers sometimes feel left behind and confused, kind of like a parent of a teenager, befuddled and maybe even alarmed by the latest cultural trends.

That's why we titled this book *An Invitation to Qualitative Fieldwork*. We mean it to be a welcome to students, novices, and rookies to try their hand at qualitative fieldwork. And we mean it to be a re-invitation for those looking for a refresher. We seek to provide a clear language for thinking about fieldwork, along with practical tips for making it happen. As we describe in Chapter One, we think of this invitation as a kind of cooking book – a work that explains both the “why to” and “how to” of qualitative cooking, both the theory of qualitative research and practical “recipes” for how to do it. Such an approach we hope will be inviting to

those feeling a bit scared by all the stuff that we have now in the cabinets and drawers of the qualitative kitchen.

Fieldwork sometimes has a mystique, as though it takes a special kind of person, someone more adventurous or outgoing than many of us. It really only takes a special set of skills, and enough knowledge of the logics those skills embody to be able to adapt them to the unique circumstances of every fieldwork project. By blending practical advice and exercises with more philosophical considerations, our book aims to teach the skills and knowledge needed to cook up a fieldwork project from inception to fruition.

As such, this book can be used in two ways. Read it in order, learning about the different methods and perspectives of qualitative fieldwork from conception to dissemination. Alternatively, if you have a question on a particular topic—consent forms?—or want to practice a skill—ethnographic observation?—skip around. The index is thorough and complete, filled with references to where you can find skills, topics, and other practical matters that the book covers.

The kitchen of social context is infinitely complex. But there is no need to make what comes out of it bland and dull, because of some sense that we need to simplify its possibilities. Through fieldwork, we can embrace that complexity and the multiple logics it manifests. We can make a social science cuisine that is tasty, nutritious, fulfilling, and diverse. And it doesn't have to be difficult. We hope in this book to show how, using multilogical methods for a multilogical world.