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Review of "Principles of Sociological Inquiry: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods"

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June 5, 2021

OER Review by Dr. Alicia Rusoja (Ph.D., assistant professor in Justice, Community and Leadership Program at Saint Mary's College of California) for [Principles of Sociological Inquiry: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods](#) (authored by Dr. Amy Blackstone, University of Maine - ME - Orono)

Review (249 word version):

This textbook excels in its conversational tone, accessibility, and clarity. It introduces qualitative and quantitative research with examples that well relate to college students' lives, interests, and professional futures. It is also a text that excludes fundamental aspects of sociological inquiry, erasing essential conversations regarding the nature and goals of knowledge production, and the related contributions of scholars of Color / Black, Indigenous, Peoples of Color (BIPOC) scholars, feminist and LGBTQIA scholars to the field. As written, student researchers are inadvertently led to ignore key steps they must take in order to not (re)produce social inequity and coloniality through their research practice. For example, the text discusses only positivism, social constructivism and postmodernism, leaving out postpositivist realism (e.g., Satya P. Mohanty, Paula Moya, Gerald Campano), feminist standpoint theory (e.g., Sandra Harding, as well as Black Feminist Thought, see Patricia Hill Collins), and acknowledgement of the wide range of critical research methodologies. There is also no discussion about the ways in which academic research has been a tool of colonization (see the work of Indigenous Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith, of Indigenous scholar Eve Tuck, etc) and coloniality (e.g., Lisa Patel). In general, the text misses a great deal of information related to historicizing research, researcher positionality, and important detail regarding selection of methods, data analysis (including member checks), study limitations, write up and making public of findings. This is an introductory textbook that will benefit from edits that ensure its appropriateness for current sociological inquiry courses.

Review (version using format provided by BC Campus Open Ed):

Comprehensiveness

Q: The text covers all areas and ideas of the subject appropriately and provides an effective index and/or glossary

I downloaded and reviewed the PDF of this textbook and there was no table of contents, index or glossary. These are all very important for students and for instructors, so ensuring these are included in future revisions is fundamental.

The text did cover a lot of the areas and ideas of the subject (qualitative and quantitative research methods) and I was impressed by its accessible, clear, conversational tone, as well as by many of the examples provided by the author which well related to college students lives, interests, and to the kinds of things they could use sociological inquiry in real life, professionally and well beyond a classroom assignment.

However, the text did not cover very important aspects of sociological inquiry. For example, critical approaches to sociological inquiry were left for the very end of the textbook, with only a few approaches discussed in a very broad and not fully accurate manner. Relatedly, the text focused only on positivism, social constructivism and postmodernism, leaving out postpositivist realism (see the work of Satya P. Mohanty, Paula Moya, Gerald Campano), feminist standpoint theory (including Black Feminist Thought, see Patricia Hill Collins), and more. This is consequential because these absences leave out crucial scholarly contributions and theorizing by scholars of Color / Black, Indigenous, Peoples of Color (BIPOC) scholars regarding the nature of knowledge and the goals and uses of knowledge production. There is also no discussion about the ways in which academic research has been a tool of colonization (see the work of Indigenous Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith and the work of Eve Tuck) and continuously of coloniality (see the work of Lisa Patel) , and therefore no acknowledgement or discussion of the harmful impacts that it has had and can have on disenfranchised, minoritized, racialized (as non-white) communities when they are subjected to being researched by outsiders to their communities. In general, the text misses a great deal of information related to historicizing research, researcher positionality, and important detail regarding selection of methods, data analysis and write up of findings.

Content Accuracy

Q: Content is accurate, error-free and unbiased

Content is accurate for the most part and written in a way that would be easily understood by students early in their learning. However, there were inaccuracies. For example, action research is equated with participatory action research (PAR). PAR is a type of action research but there are a great number of action research methodologies, including practitioner research, teacher research, evaluation research, etc, and not all are critical. I understand the text was written quite a while ago. It is absolutely due for updating and it must give more attention to critical approaches to research (see work on “research justice” by Jolivet, decolonizing and humanizing research work by Linda Tuhiwai Smith and many others, etc).

Relevance

Q: Content is up-to-date, but not in a way that will quickly make the text obsolete within a short period of time. The text is written and/or arranged in such a way that necessary updates will be relatively easy and straightforward to implement

The text is written in a way that it could be easily updated and it is in need of updating. I am aware that this isn't a text about critical approaches to sociological inquiry. However, when those are referenced (as they should be for a comprehensive or at least introductory sense of sociological inquiry, especially in 2021) those references should be accurate and up-to-date.

As other reviewers have noted, there are links that no longer work. I wonder if it would be possible to include images and figures in the text itself versus having students/instructors have to click on links to find the images or information being discussed.

Clarity

Q: The text is written in lucid, accessible prose, and provides adequate context for any jargon/technical terminology used

The text is written in accessible prose and, as noted earlier, many of the examples provided are very relatable for a college student demographic. I particularly appreciated the sections where there were tables that explained complex information (e.g., when examples of non-sociological research questions were provided for students to understand how to compose research questions, or when different approaches to research were laid out in table format for a review of the information presented).

Consistency

Q: The text is internally consistent in terms of terminology and framework

Yes, the text is internally consistent though it isn't always consistent with the terms and frameworks used in the field.

Modularity

Q: The text is easily and readily divisible into smaller reading sections that can be assigned at different points within the course (i.e., enormous blocks of text without subheadings should be avoided). The text should not be overly self-referential, and should be easily reorganized and realigned with various subunits of a course without presenting much disruption to the reader.

I very much appreciated that there were many small sections I could have shared with my students for an easy and quick read on a particular topic (for example, how to compose research questions related to empirical inquiry).

There were several places where the text assumed a reader of this text would have taken an introductory sociology course or would have read all the previous chapters of the text. The textbook could benefit from taking these references out and instead briefly noting whatever it is the author would like the student to remember or know as many students might not have taken (nor remember) an intro course, or engaged with an earlier or later chapter.

Organization

Q: The topics in the text are presented in a logical, clear fashion

The organization of the text is logical and clear.

Interface

Q: The text is free of significant interface issues, including navigation problems, distortion of images/charts, and any other display features that may distract or confuse the reader

The formatting was a bit off (this is in the PDF version), which made reading the text distracting. I would include the images and examples (such as comics) that the author would like us to read in the text itself (versus in link form) so that one doesn't have to leave the text to engage with a figure being referenced and then return to the text.

Grammar

Q: The text contains no grammatical errors

I did not see any grammatical errors.

Cultural Relevance

Q: The text is not culturally insensitive or offensive in any way. It should make use of examples that are inclusive of a variety of races, ethnicities, and backgrounds

The text should be upgraded so that it presents sociological inquiry from perspectives that go beyond Eurocentric or Western ones. The textbook would benefit from including types of examples provided (of sociological studies) that are attentive to issues of power and social change, including of researcher positionality, accountability to study participants, etc. I was surprised to see gender being presented only in terms of "female", "male" and "other", especially for a text written by someone who identifies as a gender scholar. It seems that this could be a result of it being written in the early 2010s. That said, Indigenous and other scholars of Color / BIPOC scholars have been theorizing and contributing to the field for many decades and including their studies and contributions is fundamental. The text must also devote attention to students inquiring into how their positionality shapes the research questions they ask, the research design, their instrument design, their data analysis, and the limitations and validity of their study, very specifically attending to race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, citizenship, language, etc (their own, their participants, etc), as well as to the consequence of the insider-outsider continuum in terms of the researcher's positionality in relationship to research site and/or population.

Final Thoughts

Q: Are there any other comments you would like to make about this book, for example, its appropriateness in a Canadian context or specific updates you think need to be made?

It would be very helpful for the author to include more information at the beginning about who they are (positionality), especially in terms of the research they do. This is particularly so given that they refer to their own research at various points in the textbook (being a sociologist of gender, for example) yet do it so broadly that the reader doesn't have a sense of who is introducing them to this really important topic.

In general, I believe the textbook, as currently written, excels in its conversational tone, accessibility, clarity. I also believe that it excludes fundamental aspects of sociological inquiry. As a result, it risks erasing essential conversations regarding the nature of knowledge production and its goals, crucial contributions of scholars of Color to the field, as well as

encouraging student researchers to ignore key steps they must take in order to not (re)produce social inequalities and coloniality through their research practice.

This is an introductory textbook that can be edited and transformed to ensure appropriateness for current sociological inquiry courses.