

Soup to Nuts in *Doing Qualitative Research: A Comprehensive Guide* by David Silverman and Amir Marvasti

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Doing Qualitative Research: A Comprehensive Guide by David Silverman and Amir Marvasti is a masterpiece for any graduate student looking for guidance in research and dissertation process. The authors provide extensive information on the entire research and dissertation procedure as well as offer tips to conquer the qualifying exam and the rewards and challenges to publishing post dissertation. Key words: *Qualitative Research, Methodology, and Dissertation*

As a graduate student, specifically a Ph.D. candidate, I have found that obtaining information is a form of survival. Students will talk about their experiences in courses and share information about class assignments. For the most part that is how many of us get through a course and eventually a program. As I am in the last course of my program, I have discovered that I do not know everything that will bring me to passing the qualifying exam and defending a dissertation proposal.

The graduate program, in which I am enrolled, requires that students take two qualitative courses, two quantitative courses, and a required doctoral seminar. All courses are intended to prepare students for the dissertation research. It is customary to make the doctoral seminar the last course taken considering that all other requirements have been met. At this point in the program many students are still struggling with topics, methods, and are posing questions of anticipation; primarily on what to expect from the qualifying exam and what the research experience will entail.

If students, faculty, and staff were to get together and share information about the graduate school process it would probably look like *Doing Qualitative Research: A Comprehensive Guide* by Silverman and Marvasti (2008). Silverman and Marvasti provide an exceptional guide for conducting qualitative research. My approach to this book is that of a graduate student. At first glance the book seemed interesting and upon reading and going through each chapter, I wondered what took so long. Of course that is easier for me to say than it was for the authors to write. Although the authors have published several pieces on research, this one is by far the most accurate in terms of addressing students' needs. A comprehensive guide it is, nothing is left out. Silverman and Marvasti take the reader from how to use the text to how to find employment after the final defense.

While this book focuses on qualitative research, chapter two outlines the reasons why qualitative research would be beneficial for a study as opposed to quantitative research. Here, readers have the opportunity to distinctively choose the method that best fits their study. Graduate students may often find themselves in the middle of their coursework or enrolled in the last few courses when suddenly they are faced with the task of making a decision on a dissertation topic. For most common students who have not

looked ahead on their topic and even less researched it, the only thought may be to take on a qualitative approach. Silverman and Marvasti (2008) explain why students should chose wisely when deciding on a research method. They emphasize that the method will be driven by what the researcher wants to know. Moreover, “Any good researcher knows that your choice of method should not be predetermined” (Silverman & Marvasti, p. 8). Anyone looking to conduct qualitative research, especially a novice researcher, can ask themselves Silverman and Marvasti’s six relative questions regarding the scope of their research intentions (p. 11). For the most part we are told that our research has to contribute originality to our respective fields; however, answering these questions solidifies the commitment to qualitative research and the topic.

In chapter three the authors focus on social research. Selecting a topic can be the most difficult part of the dissertation process. Not only does the topic have to be original, but it also has to be substantive enough to hold interest with the researcher. If a topic is not motivating, researchers can find themselves in a difficult position of having to start over. Silverman and Marvasti (2008) present four means by which a researcher can go about selecting a topic. The first is social obligation, which can lead the researcher towards a topic that is saturated with data describing a particular social phenomenon. Secondly, curiosity can be the reason for choosing a topic because researchers can be curious about researching a particular part of “social life”; therefore, “this sense of wonder about the world [can guide questions and observations]” (Silverman & Marvasti, p. 30). Third, an assignment or job position can certainly strike up an idea. Sometimes we surround ourselves with information that may not be of interest at first glance, but as we continue to work with data, certain patterns and trends spark an interest about which we can certainly take advantage. Lastly, the personal experience is the most commonly used resource for topic selection. An example shared in the book was about how one person used his policing background as a dissertation topic. He mentions that the knowledge that others held about policing and undercover work were merely perceptions provided by the media. The gap between what was portrayed and what was “real” led him to write his dissertation topic in this area (Silverman & Marvasti, p. 32). The chapter continues with a wealth of information, such as selecting a methodology, deciding on a chair, the institutional review board (IRB) process, data collection, the role of theory, and data analysis.

In the next part of the book, the authors get to the core of research by guiding researchers on starting their quest. Topic selections are discussed thoroughly to include theory, methodology, and the writing process. Silverman and Marvasti suggest using flow charts will help in narrowing a topic. They also cite Miles and Huberman’s 1984 work by offering advice such as “selecting a foggy research question and then defogging it” (as cited in Silverman & Marvasti, 2008, p. 113). Another great qualitative researcher posits that thinking of a research topic as a funnel provides a visual understanding of how narrow the topic must be. Like a funnel, the top starts off wide and tapers off into a narrow and concentrated scope (R. J. Chenail, personal communication, 2008).

The theory section of the book is a refresher to any theories course a graduate student may have taken. This section defines theory and also provides the meanings for model, concept, hypothesis, methodology, and method as well as their uses (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008, p. 132).

Because methodology can be challenging, some students may not have an idea about what methodology they wish to use or may even be passionate about a particular approach only to find out that their method of choice would not yield the expected results when using their chosen methodology. Silverman and Marvasti (2008) present a table that simplifies the methods that are used with the methodology. For example, using observation as a method for quantitative research would be used as a foundation for creating a questionnaire or survey. In qualitative research, observation would be functional to “understanding another culture” (Silverman & Marvasti, p. 145).

In my opinion, the most anticipated portion of the dissertation is the proposal. This is where all the hard work has been incorporated into a document that will be presented to a committee and judged for approval. As intimidating as that sounds, the proposal is most importantly useful to the researcher. This is when all of the research concepts have been clarified and as the prospective researcher, the position to convince anyone, especially your committee of the importance of your research is this moment. Planning, persuasiveness, and practicality are essential when trying to achieve academic support to move forward with the research. Silverman and Marvasti (2008) advise creating a precise planning timetable. While most dissertations are written by novice researchers, advice on preparing a timetable should be sought out from a faculty member or someone comparable with experience. Being persuasive requires absolute knowledge of the proposed research. At this point the researcher would know the inside and outs of the projected study and now it is time to persuade others on the importance of this social phenomenon while staying realistic with the timetable. Regardless of the methodology, Silverman and Marvasti mention the importance of being practical. While we may want to change the world, the dissertation is not a place to attempt such a movement. Here the researcher should “communicate how the research will address a social problem” (Silverman & Marvasti, pp. 180-81).

Silverman and Marvasti (2008) provide several parts to the text that are devoted to qualitative research and the dissertation. While all of the information is incredibly useful, the authors out do themselves by providing a section on qualifying exams and what to anticipate. Another impressive addition is the last section, where the authors discuss what happens after successfully defending the final dissertation.

In the “aftermath” section, Silverman and Marvasti (2008) iterate the importance of publishing. While it is not a must, publishing opens doors to many career opportunities. “Not publishing limits those opportunities to teaching at community colleges or even smaller less-known four-year colleges” moreover, “you will have a heavy teaching load and few opportunities to pursue your research interests” (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008, p. 442).

As you can see Silverman and Marvasti (2008) include just about everything there is to know about the graduate student experience with a focus on qualitative research, dissertations, and even the qualifying exam and publishing forum. From soup to nuts, the authors have created a comprehensive guide that should be a required text in all graduate programs especially those leading to a Ph.D. I also encourage readers to visit the book’s web page at Sage (<http://www.sagepub.com/booksProdDesc.nav?prodId=Book228336>) to sample some of the tasty chapters from the book which are available online. I think once you do, you will want to come back for the complete meal.

References

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