

Barker, C. Pistrang, N. & Elliott, R. (2nd ed) (2003). **RESEARCH METHODS IN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY – An Introduction for Students and Practitioners**. Chichester. John Wiley and Sons, 284 pg. Ukp 24.95 @ wileyurope.com or @amazonuk.com

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For clinicians, books on research methodology have a tendency to read as a little dry or overly quantitative. This book is a refreshing exemption. Written by clinicians this book does a good job of bridging the gap that unfortunately often exists between clinical and research settings. The authors are from the US and the UK and in contrast to the first edition from 1994, the new version has several chapters dealing explicitly with qualitative issues.

The first chapter outlines the research process, dividing it into the stages of groundwork, measurement, design and analysis/interpretation, an outline that basically provides the structure of the book. The chapter presents the metaphor of research as a story, yet one with many unexpected turns and complications. The stance advocated throughout the book is one of “methodological pluralism”, i.e. that no single research method is superior, but that the methods chosen should be appropriate for the objects of investigation.

The second chapter outlines perspectives on research, namely philosophical, professional and personal issues involved in the research process. What is particularly refreshing here is that the philosophical issues, while adequately covered, do not take up too much space (and are presented without silly little pictures of Descartes and Locke!) – I know very few clinicians who actually care as to the details of the philosophical approach of a design, as long as it works. More interestingly, the second chapter also explores the relationship between clinical practice and research – and addresses the fact that a lot of clinicians do not wish to do research – and outlines the forms research may assume in a clinical setting. Various models for doing research in clinical settings are outlined, e.g. as the “evidence-based practitioner”, who searches for the best evidence on which to base clinical decisions.

The third chapter outlines the first stage of research, namely doing the groundwork. This covers basic aspects such as choosing the topic, scanning the literature, developing questions, drafting a proposal and seeking funding. It also addresses more practical issues, such as using questionnaires already available, gaining access to a clinical population and underscores the necessity of having a good relationship between researcher and the gatekeepers of the research setting. Here, as throughout the book, the “textbook basics” of research are supplemented with practical issues.

Chapter 4 covers the foundations of quantitative research, and chapter 5 the foundations of qualitative, and in subsequent chapters both types of research are elaborated upon. Chapter four is basic, but not overly so, in its description of measurement of psychological constructs, types of validity, reliability and generalizability. The chapter is well written and the points elegantly summarized. A little more space could have been devoted to ipsative data, as nominal scales are abundant in clinical settings. Quantitative methods and measures are dealt with more extensively

in the subsequent chapters that cover self-report methods (chap 6), and observation (chap 7). These chapters similarly do a good job of outlining the advantages and disadvantages of quantitative methods as well as reliability and validity issues, again without getting lost in psychometrics.

In the present context, the chapters on qualitative methods deserve special attention. The foundations of qualitative research are outlined in the quite long chapter 5 that covers not only the advantages and disadvantages of qualitative methods, but also their historic background, and outlines phenomenological and social constructionist approaches. Unfortunately, in their exploration of social constructionism, the authors reduce postmodernism to a mere “movement”, rather than a societal transformation. This may seem like trivial hairsplitting, yet the implications are far reaching. If postmodernism is, indeed, a societal transformation then any methodology that takes this into account, has intrinsically linked methodology and design to the historical and cultural context of which it is part; in contrast, any design that leans on cultural “movements” may present little more than fashion statements. Whether one likes the concept of the postmodern or not, the point to be made is that clinical research might well benefit from taking contemporary societal transformations into account, but that point does not clearly come across here. On a related note, the concept of ecological validity is only named in passing in a subsequent chapter. Chapter 5 also briefly addresses the possibility of combining quantitative and qualitative methods either in an explorative successive manner or as complementary strategies.

Qualitative self-report measures – most notably the qualitative interview - are covered in chapter 6, which, apart from addressing the technical matters of various interview types, administration, and an interview schedule deal with topics such as interview style and skills. Qualitative observation is covered in chapter 7 where participant observation and text-based research is described. Apart from the technical matters pertaining to field notes and questions, practical issues, such as how to gain access to an observational setting, are also touched upon. Validity and reliability issues are also addressed, as are ethical concerns. Both chapters provide illustrative examples.

Chapter 8 deals with the “foundation of design”, i.e. the “logical structure” of the study. Experimental and non-experimental designs and their various subtypes are outlined, and various types of causality models are explored, as are issues of validity. The chapter deals quite extensively with random designs including issues of control and comparison groups, as well as technical, ethical and practical issues. Although, as the authors quite rightly point out, design often follows from method, design could have been elaborated more upon earlier.

Many with a clinical background will no doubt find the chapter (9) on “Small-N designs” to be inspiring. The chapter does a good job of describing the subtypes of single case experiments, case studies and time series designs. Especially the systematic case study is explored in terms of both qualitative and quantitative methodology e.g. in order to demonstrate clinical change or investigate the therapeutic process. The chapter also touches upon data analysis and issues of generalizability although these are explored in more detail in chapter 10. This chapter is of particular interest to clinicians contemplating research, but without access to large populations.

The topics of sampling and ethics have been combined in chapter 10. The sampling part addresses the basics of power primer and generalizability, and the ethics section outlines the basic and well-known ethic principles, namely informed consent, avoidance of harm, privacy and confidentiality. As these standards have been virtually universalized, non-English and non-American readers may also benefit from studying them, while, of course, consulting national Ethics Committees before conducting research.

An entire chapter (11) deals with evaluation research. The chapter departs from the research process framework of the book, but is included as many clinicians may not become involved in direct research, but may well become involved in evaluation. The process of evaluation is traced, from defining the aim, constructing an impact model, specifying the target population and target problem, assessing needs, delivery and/or outcome. The chapter rightly underscores how the sociopolitical context and organizational issues may influence the evaluation process. Cost-effectiveness is also addressed and how this may be included in the evaluation. Again, technical matters are supplemented with practical and organizational issues.

The final chapter deals with analysis, interpretation and dissemination. After outlining both quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis, the interpretation process is outlined, from understanding the meaning of the findings, assessing the strength and limitations of the study and considering the professional implications of the findings. The dissemination part deals with the language of the writings and practical matters pertaining to publication and authorship. The authors urge researchers to make their findings widely known in order to have impact outside the scientific community

The initial outline of the research process provides a good structure to the book, yet some topics could have been introduced earlier. Sample size and power primers, as well as ethics could have been covered earlier, as these issues should be addressed early in any research design. However, the research process is complex and a presentation of it may take various forms. For sake of clarity the book could have been divided into parts corresponding to the outlined four parts of the research process. An elaboration on ipsative data analysis, and on ecological validity could have been wished for, and the reduction of postmodernism to a mere cultural movement hinders a more thorough investigation of the relationship between research and societal change.

Despite these imperfections the book remains highly recommendable. The individual chapters are well laid out, with good summaries, the key points highlighted in boxes and further reading suggested by the end of each chapter. The technical matters of research are supplemented with practical issues related to setting and organization throughout the book, making this a highly relevant text for clinicians contemplating research, or for grade students aiming at a clinical career.

In the epilogue the authors return to the initial metaphor of research as a story and supplement this with other metaphors, including that of research as a tradition. The authors express their wish that more clinicians will join this tradition and add to the voices of other researchers. This book certainly provides a tempting invitation.