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[Article]

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Review
Sue Heath and Charlie Walker
Innovations in Youth Research
Palgrave Macmillan Publishers
pp 281

Rodolfo Leyva

INNOVATIONS IN YOUTH RESEARCH brings together a collection of 12 articles, focusing on their unique methodological approaches and corresponding ethical concerns. Writing in a response to the recent wave of critiques of traditional qualitative methods (i.e., interview and ethnographic approaches), the editors argue that the book offers a plethora of innovative techniques that demonstrate how qualitative research can be updated and recharged to better gauge and document the complexities of modern young people.

When I first opened the book, I was immediately impressed and in agreement with the editors' lucid and convincing argument that research on young people needs to adopt a more holistic use of varied methods that compliment each other in order to generate uniquely different data that is otherwise inaccessible via the use of traditional qualitative methods. Indeed, reading through the contents page, I was delighted to see in the chapter titles phrases like, 'music elicitation', 'the use of mental maps', and 'mixed method', expecting to maybe read about the use of psychological priming tests on young people. Unfortunately, as I read each chapter, I was a bit disappointed with the content. This is not to suggest that the book is not insightful or well written. In fact, I agree with just about all of different authors' major conclusions and lessons, and to be certain the methods used in the studies described were innovative, at least in the strict OED sense of the word. Chapter 3 for example, describes an ethnographic study on young people's attachment to their neighborhoods, where the researchers added neighborhood car rides with their participants to their methodological toolkit.

However, I felt that the title and to some extent the introductory chapter are somewhat misleading. The book should really be titled "Qualitative Methodological Innovations In Youth Identity Research", since there is no article that describes the inclusion of the use of quantitative methods. Chapter 5 was equally deceptive in its use of 'mixed methods', and should have been titled 'Triangulation in Narrative Research', as it is a fine example of using multiple qualitative methods to triangulate a specific research exploration. Still, and this could just be my subjective interpretation, but at least from anecdotal accounts, the term 'mixed methods' is reserved for the utilization of both qualitative and quantitative methods.

As for the innovations (and with the exception of chapter 2, which describes the use of music elicitation on metal fans that likely generated higher quality data than would simple interview questions), I was not convinced that most of the ones described in these studies were particularly necessary. Take for example, the use of mental maps described in chapter 4 where the authors had participants draw out geographical maps of their communities in order to elicit thicker descriptions that can better elucidate their participants' affective attachment to space and place. Likewise the study in chapter 6 describes how youth participants in India were given cameras to take pictures of the buildings and locations that had meaning to them. While these

methodological additions certainly complemented the use of standard ethnographic methods, I really do not see how they helped to add anything uniquely different that could not have been captured via the use of carefully crafted semi-structured or open-ended interview questions. Contrary to the editors, I take the position that multiple methods should be used to validate, and not merely complement each other.

In other instances, a few articles, whilst insightful, seemed out of place for a book dedicated to innovations in methods. Chapter 12 for example, concerns an account whereby the author discusses some of the major issues of conducting research in cross-cultural settings (e.g., preparing for fieldwork, negotiating access). The actual methods used, however, were only briefly mentioned as simply ethnographic. While chapter 13 describes a conversation between a researcher and his former PhD supervisor talking about issues of reflexivity and the representation of participants that can occur after the ethnographic collection of data.

Nonetheless, this book is a great example of the literature of qualitative studies on youth identities and subjectivities, and anyone interested in this line of research can definitely pick up some pointers from this book. However, given that the major lesson and conclusion to most of these types of studies is always predetermined by some permutation of the argument that *young people actively construct their identities around the competing socio-cultural discourses and physical locations available to them*, than why bother with innovative methods at all?

I get it, identities are fluid and young people have an affective attachment to their respective local cultures and proximate geography. Do we really need participatory photographic and self-portrait methods to once again document this now overly documented sociological law?

Let's move on from this, and let's implement a creative methodology to match.