

Review:

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Lesley Noaks & Emma Wincup (2004). Criminological Research—Understanding Qualitative Methods. London: Sage, 208 pages, Cloth (ISBN 0 7619 7406 7) £60 / Paper (ISBN 0 7619 7407 5) £18,99

Mark R. Pogrebin (Ed.) (2003). Qualitative Approaches to Criminal Justice—Perspectives from the Field. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 406 pages, Cloth (ISBN 0 7619 2602 X) £65 / Paper (ISBN 0 7619 2603 8) £31

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Abstract: This review essay provides a brief introduction to the use of qualitative methods in criminological research, before moving on to describe the content of the two books. The books are quite different in a number of ways. NOAKS and WINCUP take the "how to do it" approach, making the book very useful for students and researchers new to qualitative methods. In contrast, POGREBIN's edited collection provides a large number of "how it has been done" examples with an equal focus on the findings as on the methodological approach. Although both books devote space to ethical dilemmas, the nature of the dilemmas and how they are resolved varies. This is probably due to the age of some of the chapters within POGREBIN's book (all are reprints and date back to 1973) but may also reflect different ethical stances in the USA and UK.

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1. Introduction

Although still seen by many as the "underdog", qualitative research methods are being increasingly used within criminology. The range of subjects that criminologists conduct research on is very broad and typically includes research on: different types of offenders (e.g. young, women, black and minority ethnic); offences (e.g. violent, property, drugs); criminal justice agencies (e.g. police, probation, prison) and victims (e.g. gender, type of victimisation, age). Examples of criminological research using qualitative methods can be found in *FQS* issue "Qualitative Methods in Various Disciplines III: Criminology" (LÖSCHPER & MEUSER 2002). [1]

Despite it being increasingly difficult to keep track of the number of research methods books relating to criminology, few have focused exclusively on qualitative research. In fact, it was only as I came to write this review that I realised how few there actually are. Most tend to cover both qualitative and quantitative methods, however NOAKS and WINCUP's textbook and POGREBIN's edited collection are exceptions, both focusing predominantly upon qualitative methods. [2]

If there was ever a question mark over whether there was enough scope for a criminology book to focus solely on qualitative methods, NOAKS and WINCUP's and POGREBIN's books can be seen as answering this question in the affirmative. Just as there is a large range of qualitative methods that may be used in criminological research (e.g. interviews, documentary analysis or observation), within the field of criminology there is an equally large range of areas that qualitative methods might address (e.g. the judiciary, police or probation). [3]

What comes first: the qualitative methods or the areas of criminological research? This is the question that the authors of these books must have had to consider at the book proposal stage, and both books address this question differently. The starting point for NOAKS and WINCUP is a description of qualitative methods, with examples from their own research and others' to illustrate. In contrast, the starting point for POGREBIN is the areas of criminological research, to provide examples of how different qualitative methods have been used. Neither starting point is incorrect; however, the fact that both books have different starting points is just one of the ways in which these books are very different. In this review I provide an overview and evaluation of the contents of each of the books and then explore how a common theme between them—ethical issues—are presented. [4]

2. Evaluation of Content: NOAKS and WINCUP

NOAKS and WINCUP's *Criminological Research—Understanding Qualitative Methods* provides an informative and well-organised text for students and researchers new to the field. As a recent addition to Sage's *Introducing Qualitative Methods* series, edited by David SILVERMAN, it joins books such as JARVILUOMA, MOISALA and VIKKO's (2003) *Gender and Qualitative Methods*, SHAW's (1999) *Qualitative Evaluation* and GREEN and THOROGOOD's (2004) *Qualitative Methods for Health Research*. [5]

The book consists of three parts and is made up of eleven chapters, each of which is followed by a set of exercises, further reading and a list of websites. In the first part NOAKS and WINCUP describe the history of qualitative research in criminology, the political dimensions of criminal justice research (including issues around funding) and ethical issues that may arise. Some of the main reasons for conducting qualitative research on criminological topics are explained: because it provides a means of researching the "dark figure of crime"; because it leads to an "appreciation" of the social world from the point of view of the offender, victim or criminal justice professional; because it can complement quantitative research;

and because it helps to inform the development of policies of crime concern. The history of qualitative research moves on appropriately to the discussion of the political dimensions of criminal justice research. They provide an overview of the recent £250 million Home Office Crime Reduction Programme (CRP), ten per cent of which was devoted to evaluation. With such a large sum of money for criminological evaluations, this is a topical area and one in which many academics in England and Wales were involved. [6]

The final chapter in the first part considers ethical issues, and this is appropriately linked in to the preceding chapter on political issues, by considering how politics might influence or even create ethical dilemmas:

"... most of the research undertaken will have a political context. Typically the challenge of producing objective research will be faced by those undertaking funded research where the sponsor might be a government or private organisation or company with a vested interest in the outcomes. This can result in pressure to bury unwelcome messages that emerge from the research findings, and the consequent ethical dilemmas that presents." (NOAKS & WINCUP 2004, p.39) [7]

Part two provides a guide through the qualitative research process, from gaining access through to analysing data analysis. Particular emphasis is given in this part to interviews, ethnography and the use of documents in qualitative research. Each of the chapters manages to fuse the more recent research with the less recent, and the more recent criminological and methodological theory with the less recent. This, they manage to do in a seamless and appropriate manner. The chapter on analysing qualitative data would benefit from being longer and more detailed. This is understandable, however, because the process of analysis is often very difficult to describe and there is a large amount of variation between research methods, projects and individual researchers. [8]

The third, and final, section provides two case studies where NOAKS and WINCUP both reflect individually on the research process using their own research. In Chapter Nine WINCUP describes her Home Office research study on substance use among young homeless people. She pays particular attention to three issues: understanding the political context; managing risk and danger; and the use of incentives when recruiting participants. Regarding the latter point, WINCUP explains that a cash payment is often given to people who agree to participate in research on drug use. She discusses the debates surrounding this issue, and also offers her own perspective:

"There is of course a risk that payments made may be used to procure drugs as there is when state benefits are paid to drug users. However, payments may equally be used to pay for food, rent or clothing according to the needs of the respondent. Such moral judgements should not influence a decision that in essence concerns the payment of a suitable fee for a service, in other words, the provision of a drug users' knowledge." (WINCUP in NOAKS & WINCUP 2004, p.150) [9]

In a completely different political and research context in Chapter Ten, NOAKS describes her doctoral thesis on private policing. Particular attention is given to: access issues; key informants; covert roles and data analysis. She explains how she gained entry to the field via a gatekeeper, how she managed relations once in the field and how she defined her role to others. As a lengthy process, and subject to different kinds of "insider information", her discussion of the dilemmas she faced is refreshingly honest:

"The dilemmas for a researcher regarding covert activities and knowledge are intensified when there has been an extended period of fieldwork with relatively few individuals. I was in the field for two and a half years on this project and came to know the key players as individuals. Familiarization with a small commercial company also involved direct relations with the wife and child of the company director and an awareness of the extent to which the success of business was critical for the whole family. As the fieldwork progressed, and particularly as the research revealed a range of problems in the operations of the company, I encountered increasing challenges to my construction of the research role as objective researcher." (NOAKS in NOAKS & WINCUP 2004, p.168) [10]

NOAKS and WINCUP's book is a well-written, topical textbook most suitable for criminology undergraduates or postgraduates new to criminological research. It takes the new researcher through the research process, stage by stage, and does not forget to include the practical issues that may arise when conducting research more generally. Things that may seem obvious to more experienced researchers, such as taking back-up batteries for audio tape recorders and plenty of tapes, are likely to be useful to less experienced researchers before they learn by making mistakes. The book is well balanced throughout, with plenty of space given to the discussion of problems that may arise as well as the academic and personal rewards that may be reaped through the use of qualitative methods in criminological research. The third part works to solidify and exemplify much of the earlier contents and the full and frank description of what is so often in reality a "messy" process makes interesting reading for researchers of all levels. [11]

3. Evaluation of Content: POGREBIN

POGREBIN's is a large edited collection, consisting of 29 chapters split into five sections: Introduction to Qualitative Methods; Police; Judicial; Corrections; and Fieldwork Experiences: Ethical Dilemmas. In addition to writing the preface and an introduction to each of the sections, POGREBIN himself is one of the authors in five of the chapters. All of the chapters are reprints of previously published research—in part one from books and parts two to five from journals. Most of the chapters are quite dated, with three having an original publication date in the 1970s (HEUMANN 1978; SPRADLEY 1979; VAN MAANEN 1973). The more recent chapters are made up of POGREBIN's own research, although are also reprints of previously published research (POGREBIN & DODGE 2001; WEST-SMITH, POGREBIN & POOLE 2000). [12]

The range of criminological issues that the book addresses is large, and includes: sexual assault; prison gangs; probation pre-sentence reports; women's experiences of prison; and plea-bargaining. Because the majority of chapters are reprinted from journals they generally follow the standard style of an overview of relevant literature, a description of how the research was conducted and methodological issues that arose, presentation of the research findings and discussion. This does mean that a discussion of qualitative methods can get sidelined or even lost in the chapters where the methods section is short. In situating the methods chosen within the larger article, however, POGREBIN's collection manages to show how qualitative research can add to an existing knowledge base and how results from qualitative research may be presented and discussed. [13]

Introduction to Qualitative Methods (Section one) contains five chapters. These cover: an introduction to fieldwork; participant observation in terms of methodology and in terms of fieldwork relations; interviewing; and a reflection on early experiences of doing fieldwork. The book then moves to a thematic categorisation by those researched, beginning in Section Two with the Police. This section is quite large, made up of seven chapters. As POGREBIN notes, it is not surprising that so much criminological research has focused on the police, because they are the most visible criminal justice agency and also the role that has been popularised most through the media, for example through television shows and films: "I would venture to speculate that there has been more research and published journal articles, academic books, journalistic accounts, and movies about the police profession than any other component of the criminal justice system." (POGREBIN 2003, p.63) [14]

The following section (Section Three) contains seven chapters on the judiciary. Many of these focus on plea-bargaining rather than on the adversarial trial. As POGREBIN points out, in the USA over 90 per cent of cases are officially disposed of via plea bargaining, yet public perception of the judiciary tends to focus on the adversarial trial. Moving further along the criminal justice system, Section Four contains seven chapters on corrections, including chapters about parole interviews of sex offenders, women who work in jails and women who are imprisoned. The book concludes in Section Five, looking at ethical dilemmas in criminal justice via fieldwork experiences, although ethical dilemmas are also considered in other sections throughout the book, where appropriate. These are discussed in Section 4 (Ethical Issues) below. [15]

POGREBIN's book provides excellent examples of how qualitative methods may be used in criminological research. Although many of the chapters are dated and there is no research that is not already available elsewhere, the collection as a whole provides an easily accessible way to see a range of different qualitative methods used to answer an array of research questions in different criminological fields. It is less suitable for undergraduates and less experienced researchers because it does not provide the basic "how to do it" information that NOAKS and WINCUP present, however, it may be useful to draw on some chapters as

examples once students have acquired the basic "how to" knowledge or as an advanced text for postgraduates. [16]

4. Ethical Issues

Both books explore the ethical issues that may arise when doing qualitative research in criminology. POGREBIN dedicates the final part of his book, consisting of three chapters, to a consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of full participation in the field (in two chapters) and how the gender of the researcher can impact upon the fieldwork in both positive and negative ways (in one chapter). Of course, the re-print nature of the book means that ethical issues are also considered to some extent within the methodology sections of nearly all of the chapters. [17]

Ethical issues are considered early in NOAKS and WINCUP's book and are addressed in chapter three before the methods themselves are described. This is not meant as a criticism, but to suggest that the authors have been sensible to give ethical issues prominence in a student textbook and not treated them as the "add on" that they are sometimes (incorrectly) perceived to be. Both overt and covert observations are covered and ethical guidelines relevant to research in Britain are discussed (including the codes published by the British Society of Criminology, British Sociological Association and British Psychological Society). The case studies where the authors discuss their own work also take ethical issues into consideration and these issues are particularly interesting in NOAKS' description of her doctoral thesis. [18]

The ethical questions raised in the two books are similar in nature but are on two different levels. The risks of physical violence that researchers may face while doing fieldwork, for example, are described in both books. In POGREBIN's book MARQUART explains how he regularly came up against physical violence when he participated fully in his role as a prison guard:

"... when the situation rose I broke up fights, hauled bleeding self-mutilators or attempted suicides to the prison hospital, and utilized legitimate force in subduing inmates (e.g., in dining halls, shower rooms, cells). I even wrestled with and took a knife away from an inmate who slashed open his own stomach out of despair."
(MARQUART 2003, p.387) [19]

In NOAKS and WINCUP's book, WINCUP describes a situation that arose in her Home Office research study on substance use among young homeless people where a potentially violent situation was diffused:

"Being known as 'people asking questions about drugs' ... had the potential to create problems. We were fortunate that there was only one incident at a day centre which involved some drug dealers becoming suspicious of our motives. This was quickly resolved by the other day centre users who had been interviewed who reassured them that we were not the police and were not gathering intelligence. Situations such as these are potentially explosive and had the problems not been resolved our only

alternative would have been to cease conducting interviews in that day centre.
Research does not have to be pursued at all costs!" (WINCUP in NOAKS & WINCUP
2004, p.149) [20]

These excerpts exemplify what appears to be the case in other areas of the books—that, where researcher safety is involved, researchers in the UK place a higher premium upon the researcher (and generally the researched) than the research itself while researchers in the USA seem more willing to take more personal risks in the name of research. [21]

In the UK criminological researchers sometimes face problems in relation to being able to publish and make public their findings. This is particularly the case where the research has been funded by the government. NOAKS and WINCUP describe notorious cases dating back to the 1970s where the Home Office have tried to suppress the publication of research findings. While this is sometimes because of the political nature of the findings, this is not always the case and, sometimes, there is no reason that researchers can identify as to why they are refused permission to publish. More recent examples are also highlighted by NOAKS and WINCUP and this demonstrates how their book engages well with current topical issues within criminology in the UK. In recent years, the government have piled millions of pounds into criminological research under their Crime Reduction Programme. Under this programme, many researchers have even been required to sign the Official Secrets Act in order to undertake research. This problem is not one that is brought up in POGREBIN's book; indeed, the "moral fix" described in VAN MAANEN's chapter is quite the opposite. After witnessing a violent attack by two police officers on a man with whom VAN MAANEN was travelling while on fieldwork, the researcher faced a prison sentence when he refused to make public his research notes:

"I was in a moral fix. I could obey the subpoena, turn my notes, and assist in making the newspaper's case. Or I could refuse to comply, risk possible sanction, but in the process protect what I took to be the best interests of the patrolmen I had known in Union city." (VAN MAANEN 1973, p.367) [22]

Although in quite different circumstances and political situations, this shows that the "ownership" of data is an issue in criminological research. Because qualitative research is more contextual and descriptive in nature than quantitative research, it is possible that issues relating to the ownership of data are more complex in research using qualitative methods. [23]

5. Conclusions: An Anglo-American or Historical Divide?

While reading the two books I was continuously struck by how different the styles of qualitative research were. NOAKS and WINCUP reflected qualitative research in criminology as it is conducted in the UK, making it an excellent introductory text for students with enough topical issues to keep the more experienced researcher interested in some chapters. The chapters in POGREBIN's edited collection undoubtedly hold the researcher's interest, but with some concern for the

researcher and their participants. The phrase "you couldn't do that in the UK" sprang to mind in most chapters and there was generally a great deal more space given to the ethical concerns raised in respect to the criminal justice professionals than of those suspected or convicted of a criminal offence. For example, the ethical issue MARQUART is most concerned with in the following excerpt is that the guards understood that he was a researcher:

"... I slowly adopted the guard perspective due to my participation and deep involvement in the guard world. I laughed while the guards teased and taunted inmate homosexuals, nodded approvingly when others described how they ripped apart an inmates cell during a search, and kept a straight face when supervisors threatened to kill inmates ... I witnessed fifty incidents in which guards beat inmates (some were severely injured)—and all of these guards were well aware of my identity as a researcher." (MARQUART 2003, pp.388-389) [24]

So is there an Anglo-American divide in how British researchers use qualitative methods in criminological research compared with their American counterparts? Dare it be suggested that researchers in the UK have a higher ethical threshold than researchers in the USA? Alternatively, may it be concluded that criminological research in the UK is becoming less interesting from an academic perspective as the government fund research that is primarily interested in findings that can quickly and easily be translated into policy? Some of these propositions may have some truth to them, however because many of the chapters in POGREBIN's are dated, these propositions may alternatively read "older criminological qualitative research" instead of "the USA." As ROTH (2004) highlighted in a recent *FQS* debate around ethics: "Until recently, researchers conducted studies unthinkable today" (ROTH 2004, para. 4). [25]

Both POGREBIN's and NOAKS and WINCUP's books show that there is no "one way" to use qualitative methods in criminology and that there are a wide range of qualitative methods suitable for use in criminological research, just as there are a wide range of criminology areas to be studied using qualitative research methods. The way in which the qualitative research project is managed is likely to be guided by ethical issues that may change over time and/or place. [26]

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