



Book review

Qualitative and digital research in times of crisis: Methods, reflexivity, and ethics, edited by Helen Kara and Su-ming Khoo

Policy Press

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Reviewed by Amanda E. Woodford

“Covid is over; it’s time to return to normal,” we read in the news. Do we then need to consider research in a time of crisis if the global crisis is ‘over’?[1] Has the pandemic made us more aware of crises? Having read *Qualitative and digital research in times of crisis: Methods, reflexivity, and ethics*, I would suggest yes. The content shared across 15 chapters from 33 researchers in three sections from nine different countries opened my eyes to the various crises – global (the recent Covid-19 pandemic); environmental and immediate (land-based disasters); personal (cultural, societal, historical and ongoing); or some combination of these – that can impact communities and individuals. As the author of the second chapter in this book, Zania Koppe, states, a crisis is “a point of change, or a series of events, that disrupt the social world introducing a period of uncertainty” (p.30).

After reading the chapters in the anthology, I wonder if we are in a period of ongoing crises (considering our changing climate) or if we have always been in crisis (racism, colonisation, war and conflicts) which might not have been visible to all. Each researcher, or group of researchers, featured in this book offers valuable insights into methods, approaches, adaptations and worldviews. These insights can enable a reconsideration of how we research, as well as the impact of our research on others and on our own well-being. I valued hearing the varied voices of researchers who shared cultural perspectives which differ from Western ideas, especially when considering ethical practice. This included topics of friendship and the value of social connections. The naming and showcasing of the benefits of co-productions, co-ownership and shared works between researchers, participants, artists, and broader communities, I found inspiring. Their descriptions felt ‘real’, grounded and inviting. I found the presentation of ‘digital ways’ innovative and thought-provoking, especially when considering how to sustain a research project or the researcher when travel or resources are restricted. I felt connected to a community of fellow researchers, a widening sense of possibilities and a reduction in isolation (as a researcher situated at the bottom of the world). The offerings put forward in each chapter I experienced as an intimate step into another researcher’s/researchers’ world. In the following few paragraphs, I will zero in on areas I sense might be particularly interesting to our creative arts therapies people, yet there are so many more riches than I mention.

Many of the authors speak of the value of friendship, kindness, social bonding, cultural and religious relationships, and community building. These are areas of qualitative research (and therapeutic practice) that I have often experienced as problematic in a Euro-Western framework when considering what is ethical. Researchers often need to push against and re-angle what feels to me like a natural response to human engagement in calculated efforts to lessen harm to others. I appreciated the parts in this book that provide honest accounts of sensible adaptations in times of crisis. I was fascinated by the work of Nguyen, Baldassar, Wilding and Krzyzowski and their description of how they embraced social connections using digital methods. Their chapter, ‘Researching older Vietnam-born migrants at a distance: The role of digital kinning’, is well worth reading for those researching within their cultural communities where social ties already exist. Later chapters in the section titled ‘Recurring and longer-term crises’, which describe ethical considerations from a non-Western view, are also well worth reading. I was particularly taken by Gbenga A. Shadare’s chapter on doctoral studies in the northern region of Nigeria, which mentions the ethical principle rooted in the humanist African philosophy of Ubuntu – which they describe as simply meaning, “I am, because you are” (p.221).

I also recommend a chapter written from the perspective of two First Nation researchers and cultural practitioners, Stolte and Oliver, that presents the value of sisterhood and weaving practice to “bring people together in times of stress” (p.90). This chapter offers a perspective on material culture and Indigenous ways of connection. Next to this and within the arts-based section of the book is a visually inspiring creative medley by educators from the Whitecliffe School of Creative Arts Therapies. In this piece, Green, Levey, Evans, Lawson and Marks

place their varied experiences and modalities as they reflect on their explorations of arts-based research through autoethnography) during Covid-19. The final chapter in the arts-based section is as equally inspiring as the previous two, with Sou's and Hall's presentation of 'communicating crisis research with comics'. The standout for me was the employment of an artist "to effectively translate research findings into an engaging and accessible visual narrative" (p.96). This chapter has excellent explanations and visual examples to enable others to follow the process.

This book contains many accounts of how research was supported using digital methods, including Facebook, the intriguing use of AI and a chatbot, and many online groups. One of these groups, written about by McGrath, Bowen-Salter, Milanese and Pearce. became the grounds for a Collaborative AutoNetnographic methodology which "stemmed from an online initiative created to support doctoral students during Covid-19" (p.113). A further chapter (by Tarrant and Hughes) discusses re-using existing data from previous studies for new purposes and includes a list of places to access and archive qualitative research data, "which could be used during the crisis and as a baseline" (p.165). This potential well of data made me wonder how we could use this resource to expand on small qualitative studies to widen our reach.

My final nod is to Aaron Teo and a delightful example of autoethnographic writing. Teo skilfully weaves together different stories to provide texture, and their conversation with the words and ideas of Carolyn Ellis is a grounding example of alternative ways to engage with literature. I particularly liked this chapter as an example for students of non-traditional academic writing.

Qualitative and digital research in times of crisis: Methods, reflexivity, and ethics, to me, is about seeing alternatives; acknowledging crises; acknowledging when changes need to be made due to a crisis; working with and questioning personal values; and stating or standing in what is ethical (depending on your perspective). I highly recommend this to anyone beginning a Doctoral or Master's research journey to inspire, ground and support methods that might seem a bit outside the norm. I believe it will be a rich asset to our (ANZACATA-recognised educational providers) libraries and a resource for members of Human Research Ethics Committees. Although based on research, I also think there is much we can take from the messages inside into therapeutic practice.

It has taken me more time to formulate this review than I had planned. Yet, paradoxically, my delay is due to the threads of crisis that continue following the 'end of the pandemic'. Ali FitzGibbon, in the very first chapter, invites the reader to consider "a reflexive questioning strategy built around time, purpose, and legitimacy for [our] research decision-making" (p.17). Based on FitzGibbon's questioning strategy, should I have accepted the invitation to participate when I knew my time was 'already stretched' by other commitments, an ongoing health condition and new health challenges? No, is the clear answer. Will I take home from the chapters in this book a change in my approach to researching and a consideration of how a crisis might impact my time and resources, before deciding "should [I] do this or should someone else" (p.26)? Yes, I will.

Following is additional information about the book, and an intersubjective response, in the way of an image and poetically-formed words. I offer my response that I created before writing this review, as a way to review the content that stayed with me . I hope this inclusion provides a concise, arts-based account of my engagement with a book I found to be an excellent companion for a researcher, inquiring alongside human others within changeable landscapes. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to look closely at this book as the contributions will undoubtedly shape my ways of researching. Based on the recommendations of the editors, Kara and Khoo, I hope to: broaden ethical frames of reference; take more care; commit to anti-oppressive work; continue to expand openness to creativity; explore the use of secondary data; look to how digital methods can be supportive or not; and create positive change through the process and findings of my research work (p.250).

An intersubjective response from a reader-reviewer to *Qualitative and digital research in times of crisis: Methods, reflexivity, and ethics*



*Being held in research,
observing and responding to a crisis...*

*Responding to human needs.
Seeing differently,
acknowledging the diversity of our people,
our cultures, our ways of communicating,
coming to know, to understand.*

*Grounded with clear methods,
values, considerations, and worldviews.*

*Supported and supporting.
Working with technology.
Working towards sustained practices.
Working towards well-being.*

*Researching is not one way,
but many,
when we can look globally,
and creatively.*

Endnote

[1] In stating that the crisis is over, I am responding to the rhetoric I see around me in the media and society. However, I do not believe that the Covid-19 pandemic is over, but rather that multiple crises continue, arising from our period of intense unwellness in communities, lock-downs and the impact of Long Covid. Back to place

Author disclosure

I acknowledge that I have a relationship with the Whitecliffe College educators whose work I write about in this review.

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Amanda is a registered creative arts therapist (AThR), mixed-media artist, academic and professional practice supervisor. She is an educator at The MIECAT Institute and works out of her therapeutic arts studio, Holding Space, in Ōtepoti Dunedin, Aotearoa New Zealand. Amanda is in the final stages of completing a Professional Doctorate in Therapeutic Arts Practice, investigating experiences of living with post-operative on-going pain straddling arts-based and artistic research. Her current research brings attention to intersubjectivity with materials and emerging forms; and her past work includes creating spaces to tell life stories about culture. She loves details and, as a bricoleuse, enjoys finding alternative ways to do things to locate an individualised fit within a community of practices or ideas.



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