**Women in Research Methods**

Interview with Dr. Karen Golden-Biddle

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(interviewed by Jason Robison, Ph.D. candidate at Oklahoma State University on 9/16/22)

1. *What initiated your interest in qualitative research methods and rigorous methodology?*

“I had gotten my MBA and worked prior to going into the doctoral program. So, when I went into the doctoral program, I had worked in human resources and organization development for Fortune 200 Corporations; but when I went to study these areas, I found they didn’t reflect my experience. They were more focused on position descriptions and so forth, which are a part of it, but they didn’t reflect the everyday lived experience that I had encountered as an HR person. So, that drew me to studying concepts like informal organizations, but also to qualitative methodology, which helps us ‘get in, to learn about.’”

1. *Can you speak broadly to the necessity of rigorous methods, both within our field and then just academia as a whole?*

“I think knowing we’ve done systematic analyses and applied other kinds of traits that are of rigor, it provides assurance we can have faith in the results, right? I mean, that’s the bottom line of it. I would say the work that I’m doing now with Karen Locke, Martha Feldman and others, as well as my teaching of qualitative methods, involves looking at rigor as an outcome of our analytic work. Some of the protocols that we would say involve systematic analyses, we can do in the next step of our work. We choose and select among them based on our project. But what we’re saying when we position rigor as an outcome – and there was a special issue that we were a part of in ORM recently – is that there’s been too much effort to look at protocols, rigor, templates, models, methodologies, exemplars, and so forth that are external to our projects. We’re saying we need to bring those in and use them as determined by the internal logic of our project, rather than adhering automatically to what are considered protocols of validation, for example. It’s not that we dismiss those; we don’t. We really just want a different orientation so we can generate richer analytic work. It’s really a shift between the external dominating what we do, to knowing that validation is important and brings rigor, but using it in a way that is tailored to the internal logic of our project.” Our PDW (professional development workshop) involved this topic as well. And how we do this in a way that brings forward our best theorizing. We aren’t trying to not be rigorous. I have trained a lot of doctoral students, I have read a lot of junior and senior scholars’ work who are doing qualitative research for the first time – and really, this crosses methods and certainly crosses types of data – and this whole pursuit of validation… we need to realize that it’s critical, but its partner is discovery. And those are twin processes that really matter, but oftentimes the pursuit of one excludes the other. And I’m really about bringing forward discovery as a partner. I’ve seen too many people try to shove data into NVivo Trees, writing thousands of codes, all to say, ‘what does it mean?’ We really want to move away from that, and we are able to do that through training and trusting ourselves. Having confidence that we know our project, and we can bring in and apply the right protocols at the right time. This is all in the service of the project, and as a result, we’re better able to explain our processes in the research methods section of our papers.

1. *Sometimes it is difficult to explain our work, and what goes on inside academia to the people who are outside of it. How important is rigorous methodology when translating our findings?*

“In the writing up of these translations – and I’m in the process right now of doing a book proposal for a different audience, trying to bring forward my work on discovery, both in the study of organizations and research methodology – you want to provide assurance with your methods. You want to convey that you’re providing truthful findings; this is what we’re about, and that’s really critical. From a qualitative research standpoint, research questions may change, but they are the anchor, and we know why they have changed or may shift. And hypotheses are typically generated in a quantitative approach. Those are the two discovery points, and we know why and how we got there. So those things matter; but in terms of translating our findings to a person who hasn’t studied a particular methodology, for instance, unless we can explain things in plain language, it will be difficult to achieve. I mean, I’ve attended sessions throughout my career as a professor on methods I don’t know anything about, but I do expect the presenters to explain what they did in a language I can understand. That’s at the core of what we’re really trying to do here. If we can break our findings down into pieces of what we’re doing that matter most to us, that convey what we’re doing, then I would certainly encourage that. I think the more that we can talk plain – like we use scientistic language as a barrier sometimes. For a while, we didn’t even use pronouns in our writing, we used all passive voice. That’s kind of a knowledge shield. It keeps people from really knowing what we’re doing or asking questions about what we’re doing. I think these bite-sized notions of findings and methods are a way through that. Jean Bartunk has written some terrific work around translating research into practice; and it’s not so much the ‘into.’ Instead, it’s, ‘how are we partners, and how do we share in a dialogue about our findings and the methods that enabled us to reach them?’”

1. *How would you encourage early scholars who are interested in methods, specifically related to qualitative research? What specific opportunities might you encourage them to seek out?*

“I thought long and hard about this, and I asked a few people about what was most helpful to them. I think I could boil down their responses into two avenues. First, it’s really about seeking training and other events where you will be with colleagues, specifically those in your cohort with a similar length of training. So, I think of CARMA, the Advanced Research Methods Association sponsored by the Research Methods Division, The Academy of Management… for others it might be APA. It could be a number of different associations, but those are really critical. I know sometimes it can feel like it's a huge place, but I think the training that happens in PDWs, conference sessions, and so forth is really important. For qualitative researchers, there’s a very cool website with seminars being offered by Ruthanne Huising and others called ethnographyatelier.org, and it’s an amazing resource. So now what’s happening is universities and others – I mean, we have at least one field research conference in Boston each year so we can get people together. We get 100-150 each time, sponsored by different universities, to talk about things involving field-based research. So, there’s a lot of these small events in particular that people can find which are really helpful. And you get to know, number one, you’re normal. These are normal things, normal questions and normal issues that come up in the course of doing methodology. Second, read papers that use qualitative data; maybe even seek out papers applying a specific analytical method you’re thinking about and interested in. Pay close attention to the method section and see how they tease out the analytical work. How do they present it? We read articles in our training for their content, but then it’s also important to read them for how they’re constructed. How do the authors convey to us that their method is valid? How do they convey discovery? What happened when they gained insights along the way? Those would be some questions I would ask when reading the methods sections. So those two things, both attending and seeking events, especially ones with a similar cohort where you can ask questions, and reading methods papers, paying specific attention to how the authors developed the write-up, is a great start.”

1. *How would you encourage scholars who find methodology to be intimidating and/or overwhelming to take a leap of faith and get involved?*

“I actually think try it. For example, if you've never done qualitative research before, try three to five interviews exploring your phenomenon, even if you are doing wholly quantitative research. I’ve had students – most recently they were economists by training – who come from other departments and take the field seminar that I teach involving qualitative methods. For them, the key thing was learning how to interview, and then trying out those interviews with three to five people, focusing on what more they can learn about their phenomenon of interest. They gained, in my own reading of their work, all kinds of insight that helped shape not just their subsequent analytic work, but also their hypotheses, other literatures they may consider…. Maybe they didn’t realize X is part of phenomenon Y, and how does that play out? And then I would also recommend getting real life experience, and hearing people’s real-life experiences. I would say reach out to others who do qualitative research. I was the mentor in the OMT Division at the Academy of Management this past year, and part of that was each of us mentoring two people. I really enjoy that, and it oftentimes involves both content and method’s types of discussions. And I would say, finally, that self-doubts stop us more than anything. It’s this little thing on our shoulder that kind of says, “Oh, you can’t do it.” But really, just try. Try it with friends and interview them to see what you gain, or try it with alumni from your same school, or any kind of context you have to get out there and see what you like, what you don’t like, what you learn, and so forth. Small wins are important.

1. What are some of the developments you foresee being relevant in regard to qualitative research methods?

“Yeah. Things are bounding forward in qualitative research. I mean, I used to say, it’s the multiplicity of methods within qualitative research and perspectives, and that’s true. That’s clearly true, there are various different psychological perspectives, ontological perspectives, coming forward, so it’s a burgeoning field around that. I probably would say there’s two central themes to this work, and one of them is the kind of work a few of us are doing around creative theorizing. I think of Karen Locke, Anne Langely, Martha Feldman, and others. Karen and Martha and I do a lot of work together, and we discuss how we creatively theorize, where we come up with novel contributions through our analytical work, and how that happens. It’s not just serendipity, it’s not blind leaps of faith. We’re all kind of trying to nibble at that to see how it happens from various different perspectives. To do this, we have to feel no self-doubt. We have to feel that we can move forward and use doubt as a generative resource; not knowing is critical. Now, we’re taught all our career to know. We learn everything in the literature, we’re petrified that we haven’t found a gap in the literature, that somebody else knows about content you don’t…. and it’s really about trusting and knowing that we can use that ‘not knowing’ to help spur us forward through uncomfortable times. But when you spur on to an insight where you aren’t burdened with self-doubt, then it is extremely helpful in discovery and generative theorizing. We want to be free, not paralyzed in our analyses. So, that’s a piece of it, and it’s really exciting. The ORM special issue, the AOM PDW… they are both part of trying to work through that. The second one that I know less about, although I’ve read their paper and I’m just struggling with it in my own writing, is this exciting work by Brian Pentland and his colleagues. What they do is take this notion of process multiplicity, which is this idea – you can think of it in light of change – that there’s not one path, but many, and sometimes a path has many paths to it as well. If I’m in a change project, and we do things and something happens, it doesn’t mean that I stay the course. And we’re seeing that in studies, right? We also know that in organizations where they change things up, and then that leads to other kinds of change, may gain insight along the way. And then it becomes, ‘Oh my goodness, we’ve evolved our purpose of change now.’ The same thing happens in research; when we move along, we get insights. So, he (Pentland et al., 2020) has written a piece on process multiplicity, and that’s pretty exciting. That’s theorizing in a way, and conceptualizing not just dynamism, but the multiple pathways that people take. And there’s no one more suited to do that then Brian and his colleagues.”

1. Lisa and Tine look took over as co-editors of ORM this year, which is the first time the journal has been led by female scholars. Can you speak briefly to the importance of increased representation and how we can continue encouraging this representation throughout our field?

“This is really important. It may just be one of my favorite questions because it’s really important to embrace. I remember Karen Locke and I going – oh I don’t know, back in 1990 – to a research methods division social, and then going back in between. And you know I enjoy and appreciate my colleagues, but basically the room had no diversity except Karen and myself. When you can’t see yourself in the professional body that is doing the work, you have to kind of then do extra work – which we would do – to reach out to other colleagues. And so really, the division has made great strides in the meantime; so that’s one of the reasons having two women lead the journal, ORM, is a huge thing. I think it’s important to embrace because they inspire other women when we see them doing this. Not only can we do the methods, and do them well, but we can also become editors of a major journal in the field. I was reading about Jane Fraser (Sp?), who was the first female CEO of CITI group. She was brought in about a year ago, and when it was announced, everyone made lots of hullabaloo about her being the first woman. In a conversation with Mary Barra (sp), CEO of General Motors, Mary told her to embrace the focus on her gender because it adds to progress. It makes progress happen. So, we don’t want to say it doesn’t matter. We don’t want to dismiss it nor overplay it. We want to qualify it. Say, yes, I am. We are. It aids progress to do that, and then you can spend the rest of the time focused on your job; it’s really about that combination. And I see that’s what these two ladies are doing at ORM. It's really inspiring. They’re coming out with innovative new work, new ways of thinking about the journal, new avenues, like this, to advance our field, the area of methodology, and this journal, which they’ve taken on in full. I would say increasingly more women don’t shy away from it, claim it, and then focus on the work; it’s a new strategy. More than a strategy, it’s a way of being.”