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### **Researching Voluntary Action: Innovations and Challenges, Edited by Jon Dean and Eddy Hogg**

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Though research methods is an important topic, it is hard to keep up with all of the different methods which can be used to examine the nonprofit sector. Jon Dean and Eddy Hogg's new edited volume, *Researching Voluntary Action* fills an important void in nonprofit studies by leading the discussion on research methods for nonprofit researchers. This book, which provides first-person narratives of experiences with new and unique research methods, allows students of nonprofit studies to think about how to move the field forward. While many nonprofit researchers would benefit from this book, this would be useful in a PhD classroom for research methods.

This book is divided into 15 chapters, each of which looks at a different method used in nonprofit studies. Through a first-person narrative, each author provides guidance into how they did research using the method they are describing. By using a first-person narrative approach, the authors allow the reader to get a feel for how individuals can use these methods through a real-world example. As this is an edited volume, some chapters are better than others. The best include chapter 9 looking at television and media (by Kimberly Wiley) and chapter 11 on regulatory data (by Diarmuid McDonnell and Alasdair C. Rutherford). The authors of these chapters not only talk about their experiences doing their research, they also provide tables and charts to help guide the reader. These tables help the reader grasp the main ideas of the chapters and allows the reader something easy to go back to when using these new methods. While some of the chapters focused more on how to do methods, a few chapters felt more as an academic article focused on theory rather than practice. While theory is important, this text makes a valuable contribution by providing a guide for readers to model in their own studies.

These 15 chapters are varied in the methods discussed. Although they do not cover all of the newer methods which are used (experiments are noticeably absent from this book), it is still fairly comprehensive. Following an introduction, chapter 2 looks at focus groups. Chapter 3 explores interpretive ethnography, using a charity shop as the case study. Next, chapter 4 explains how (and why) to do research on giving circles. Following this, chapter 5 explores peer research. In nonprofit research, where we often do research with nonprofit organizations,

this provides guidance into how to coproduce research with these nonprofits. The next two chapters (6 and 7) explore how to use advertising and visual images for research, followed by archive research. Chapter 8 discusses using the Mass Observation dataset and program, followed by using television media as a method in chapter 9. Chapter 10 looks at using reporting as a method, followed by regulatory data as a research tool in chapter 11. Following this, chapter 12 explores merging survey and register data, with a focus on volunteering (chapter 14 also looks at volunteerism but focuses more on volunteer theory than research practice). Chapter 13 explores using spatial data, and chapter 14 is a conclusion of the book. Overall, this text provides an extensive introduction to nontraditional methods, pushing the field forward methodologically.

One of the strengths of this book is the personal style in which it is written. As each chapter was written from a first-person perspective, the authors give you a strong idea of what it was like to use these methods in research, which is both interesting and refreshing. Authors provide specific examples of their research so that the reader can see, from start to finish, what it is like to use the methods that the authors are discussing. This personal perspective provides something that is not often seen in a methods section; it is a step-by-step view into how to use the methods, including the challenges that people may face when doing this type of research.

I offer a few suggestions to strengthen future additions of this text. Though each chapter has an additional readings section, each section only has three additional readings. It would be useful if there was a more extensive 'additional resources' section at the end of each chapter. A longer list of additional resources would be helpful for researchers who are attempting to use new methods. A second way that this book could be improved, which mimics an issue present in many nonprofit studies, is the focus on only a few countries, mostly in the Global North. The editors do acknowledge this issue in the conclusion of their book. More work on the complexities of doing some of these research methods in diverse settings, especially for countries with multiple languages, is needed in the field. Lastly, it would be helpful for all authors to address common challenges or pitfalls in research design and execution. Some chapters provided this perspective, such as chapter 10, 'Annual Reporting in Voluntary Organizations: Opportunities for Content Analysis Research' by Carolyn Cordery and Danielle McConville which explored the challenges of using reporting data from nonprofit organizations or chapter 8, 'Using Mass Observation as a Source of Qualitative Secondary Data for Interdisciplinary Longitudinal Research on Voluntary Action' by Rose Lindsey, who acknowledged the demographic problems that were present in the Mass Observation study. These challenges help the reader plan when using these new methods.

I recommend this book to all researchers of nonprofit studies (and public administration in general), specifically those pursuing PhDs. The narratives on how to do new methods within nonprofit studies is valuable; it allows the field to think creatively about the questions we are asking and the way we are collecting data.

### **Disclosure Statement**

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest that relate to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

### **Author Biography**

**Seth Meyer** is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Bridgewater State University with a focus on nonprofit management. Dr. Meyer's research focuses on the organizational behavior of national nonprofit organizations as well as the management of and relationships between South African nonprofits.