Qualitative Research Methodology

PSY 395
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Outline

- Purposes
- How is it done?
- Data collection and analysis
- Reliability and Validity
- Blending methodologies

Why choose qualitative methods?

- Messy or “ill-structured” problems
  - Variance
  - Complexity
  - Meaning
Research purposes

- Understanding meaning
- Understanding context
- Identifying the unanticipated
- Understanding processes
- Developing causal explanations

Practical purposes

- Powerful findings
  - Credible
  - Understandable
  - Relevant
  - Emotionally impactful
- Powerful process
  - Collaborative/"empowerment" research, participatory action research approaches
  - Giving voice
  - Promoting action
- Formative ("process") evaluation

How is it done?

- Ways of looking at qualitative design (not mutually exclusive)
  - Broad
  - Deep
  - Unique
Broad
- Cross-case/cross-person
- e.g., general inductive approach, grounded theory

Deep
- Interpretive, multiple meanings
- e.g., Case studies, ethnographies, narratives
- e.g., Phenomenology, discourse analysis

Unique
- Innovative techniques
- Participatory methodologies (e.g., Photovoice at www.photovoice.com)
Research considerations

- Sampling
  - How many?
  - Purposive
    - Representation
    - Critical case
- Resources
  - Time
  - Money

Data Collection: Focus Groups

- Pros
  - Spontaneity, participants can feed off each others’ ideas.
  - Effective data gathering tool for assessing group experiences.
  - More resource-efficient than interviews.

- Cons
  - Less detail, often less opportunity to probe.
  - Participants may hold back or be reluctant to express certain opinions.
  - Can’t make assertions about individual participants’ views.
Data Collection: Focus Groups

Considerations
- Skilled facilitation essential! Have to be very conscious of who's talking, who's not, etc.
- Sometimes want homogeneity within groups on important dimensions

Data Collection: Interviews

Pros
- Can get very rich data
- More opportunity for probing, eliciting detail
- Can make assertions about individual participants' views.

Cons
- Time-intensive

Considerations
- Face vs. Phone

Data Collection: Observation

Pros
- Can assess actual behavior in context

Cons
- May cause participant reactivity

Considerations
- Becoming natural/invisible – e.g., "reality" TV
- Getting the data down – field notes
Data Collection: Other

- Participants can generate own data
  - Journaling
  - Photography
- Archival data
  - Correspondence
  - Text records
- Media

Data Analysis

- Categorization
  - Thematic coding
  - Content analysis
- Integration
  - Creating frameworks
  - Looking for elegant way to tell the story & explain to reader
  - Account for disconfirming evidence, interdependencies

Data Analysis

- Contextualization
  - Where does this framework fit?
    - "Modus Operandi"
    - Case study/narrative story - describe patterns across time
    - Conditions/bounding
## Doing it well: methodological rigor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantitative Criteria</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trustworthiness/ Authenticity</td>
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<td>Reliability</td>
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<td>Confirmability</td>
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<td>Internal Validity</td>
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### Reliability

- Dependability
  - Data collection
    - Flexible consistency
  - Data analysis
    - Inter-coder
    - Have everyone code ~ 20% of the transcripts & compare
    - Expert vs. student
    - Shared understanding
    - Team meetings
- Confirmability
  - Leave tracks!

### Validity

- How might I be wrong?
- Credibility
  - Do my methods support trust in my findings?
    - Thick description (Geertz)
  - Bias
    - Careful sampling
    - Guarding against reactivity
    - Blinding
      - To participant
      - To framework
Validity
- Do the participants' realities match the realities represented in the research conclusions?
  - Dialogic interviewing (Kieffer, 1984)
  - Triangulation

Validity
- Transferability
  - Determining applicability to other contexts
  - Providing "due diligence" on the context & relevant factors for your study.

Validity
- ...sometimes interpreted as usefulness?
Qualitative methods as part of the researcher’s toolkit

- Use the right tool for right question
- Analyze your research situation
  - What question(s) do I need to answer?
  - Process vs. Outcome questions
  - How will these findings be used?
    - How?
    - By whom?

Blending methodologies

Some approaches:
- Dialectic
  - Start with emergent perspective, then go back and test; OR
  - Start with quantitative data, go back and get interpretation
- Simultaneous application in analysis
  - Use quantitative aspects to identify possible frames for understanding your qualitative data
  - e.g., cluster analysis & look at qualitative data in that context

Blending methodologies

Overall line of inquiry may incorporate multiple kinds of questions:
- exploratory
- descriptive
- predictive/theory building