

Criminology 321

Understanding Qualitative Approaches

Term Research Project

- Start thinking about:
 - A topic
 - Whom to interview
 - An understanding of ethics issues
- First (electronic) proposal is due 6 Oct
- You cannot *formally* begin until approved

Growing up in the 60s	Becoming an addict	Activism in 1950s India	Changing identity
Managing social identity on the Internet	Challenge of being a teenage single mother	From depot to street: Real life in the RCMP	Living in an arranged marriage
Deciding to immigrate from ...	Living with spinal cord injury	Growing up a twin	The moment you know it's over
Maintaining a long-distance relationship	Coming out	Young and pregnant: What next?	Woman dealing with loss of husband

These are examples of oral history projects from other classes

Life as an Aboriginal Special Constable	Growing up gay in Vancouver	The decision to have an abortion (or not)	Experiences in the Merchant Marine
Living the Dream: From PeeWee to the NHL	Life Turns Upside Down: Healing from a stroke	Living with a family member with a mental health issue	Depot: Creating the RCMP
Living with a spinal cord injury	Getting divorced	Living in Communist Romania	Escaping the Iranian Revolution
Maintaining a long distance relationship	Busted: Doing time in a Japanese prison	Dealing with grief, coping and widowhood	Growing up in an adverse family environment

What does “qualitative methods” bring to mind?

- Non-numerical research methods - i.e., interviews, surveys, journals, videos, etc.
- In-depth interviews and surveys. The ability to understand personal experience rather than being another number.
- Interview skills and understanding the perspective(s) of others
- I think of person to person interaction and no statistics!
- For me "Qualitative methods" brings "Quantitative methods" to mind.
- It brings observational studies to mind such as interviews and questionnaires. I think of it as something expressed in words whereas quantitative is expressed in numbers.
- The focus is on the quality of research within a small sample size. It helps in answering questions like how people are the way that they are or how things happen the way that they do

These were some of your responses to the survey question that asked you what "qualitative methods" made you think of.

What does “qualitative methods” bring to mind?

- I think of things such as surveys, participant observations and the need for true understanding when I think about qualitative methods.
- I like how qualitative research methods involve observing and interacting with specific focus groups. The personal level of interviews and speculation is of particular interest where more profound subjects may be studied and brought to a broader spectrum of issues.
- It brings to mind boring and long work.
- Using non scientific methods of research
- I think qualitative are used for more personal issues or certain bias that people may experience. In that case, this can produce accurate or sometimes not accurate info.
- My first initial reaction to qualitative methods I am imagining exploring concepts through testing hypothesis with large sample groups.

Ontology

- Positivist = realist = there are social facts/laws in the world and our job is to discover them
- Interpretive = constructionist = the core phenomena are perceptions of the world and the ways we construct our realities
 - “Perceptions are real because they are real in their consequences” (W. I. Thomas)

Epistemology

- Positivist = Researcher is expert; need to maintain social distance, remain aloof to ensure ‘objectivity’ (etic; understanding)
- Interpretive = Seek “contextualized understanding of behaviours, beliefs, motivations”; closeness is valued to create rapport and gain insights into people’s perceptual worlds (emic; *verstehen*)

Methodology

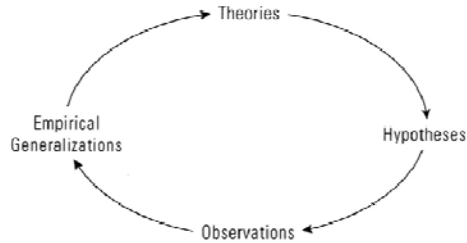
- Positivist = gather aggregate data to examine patterns, relationships, discover generalizable laws *ceteris paribus*; hypothetico-deductive method a favourite
- Interpretive = focus on behaviour in context; use methods that allow you to understand socially constructed realities; small purposive samples

Underlying similarities?

- Those are some of the differences. Are there similarities as well?
 - Both are “empirical,” i.e., they believe in real world evidence
 - Both involve theory and data and overlap in both theory and method
 - Both attempt to address and eliminate rival plausible explanations

Iterative/Cyclical

Figure 3.1
Wallace's "Wheel of Science"



SOURCE: W. Wallace. (1971). *The Logic of Science in Sociology*. Hawthorne, NY: Aldine Atherton. Reprinted with permission.

Contextual; *in situ*

- Behaviour happens in context and cannot be divorced from context
- Research is best conducted *in situ*
- Interviews may or may not happen *in situ* but generic questioning makes little sense
- The greater the time spent, the better
- Leads to an emphasis on case study

Case Study

- Greater emphasis on *depth* than breadth
- Must understand the people or milieu under study on its/their own terms; generalizability considered later and construed in more theoretical terms
- Intrinsic, instrumental and multiple case studies

Emergent; Flexible

- Research is *emergent* – looking for issues of interest rather than imposing them (part of an *inductive* approach)
- Adaptive rather than standardized strategies/procedures.
- The final research question is often different from the original