

Criminology 321

Understanding Qualitative Approaches

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Ontology, Epistemology and Methodology of Positivist and Interpretive Approaches

	Ontology What is important to know?	Epistemology Where do 'facts' come from?	Methodology How do we generate those?
Quantitative Positivist	Realist: there are social facts/laws in the world and our job is to discover them	Researcher is expert; need to maintain social distance, remain aloof to ensure 'objectivity' (etic perspective; researcher understanding); supposedly value-free	Gather aggregate data to examine patterns, relationships, discover generalizable laws <i>ceteris paribus</i> ; hypothetico-deductive method a favourite
Qualitative Interpretive	Constructionist: the core phenomena are perceptions of the world and the ways we construct our realities; you need to look at meanings, beliefs, motivations; no one reality	Seek "contextualized understanding of behaviours, beliefs, motivations"; closeness is valued to create rapport and gain insights into people's perceptual worlds (emic; <i>verstehen</i>)	Focus on behaviour in context; use methods that allow you to understand socially constructed realities; emphasis on case study designs that allow you to see and ask about processes as they unfold

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Can you solve this?

- Deductive logic
 - You start with a theory that you test by seeing whether predictions hold
- Inductive logic
 - Theory emerges from repeated observation
- Abductive logic
 - Combines the two in looking for a solution that considers rival plausible explanations

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Qualitative Priorities

- Behaviour happens in context (in situ)
- Greater emphasis on *depth* than breadth; often uses smaller samples
- Generalizability considered later, in more theoretical (rather than statistical) terms
- *Emergent* (part of *inductive* approach)
- Final research question often different from the original

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Rival Plausible Explanations

- Triangulation valued: data redundancy and saturation help assess validity and deal with RPEs
- You seek to understand perspective of participants, but not constrained by those views
- Always looking for negative evidence

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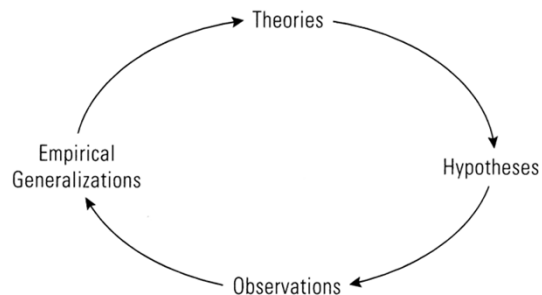
Table 2.2 Key differences between qualitative and quantitative research

	Qualitative research	Quantitative research
Objective	To gain a contextualized understanding of behaviours, beliefs, motivation.	To quantify data and extrapolate results to a broader population
Purpose	To understand why? How? What is the process? What are the influences or context?	To measure, count, or quantify a problem. To answer: How much? How often? What proportion? Which variables are correlated?
Data	Data are words (called textual data)	Data are numbers (called statistical data)
Study population	Small number of participants; selected purposively (non-probability sampling)	Large sample size of representative cases
	Referred to as participants or interviewees	Referred to as respondents or subjects
Data collection methods	In-depth interviews, observation, group discussions	Population surveys, opinion polls, exit interviews
Analysis	Analysis is interpretive	Analysis is statistical
Outcome	To develop an initial understanding, to identify and explain behaviour, beliefs or actions	To identify prevalence, averages and patterns in data. To generalize to a broader population

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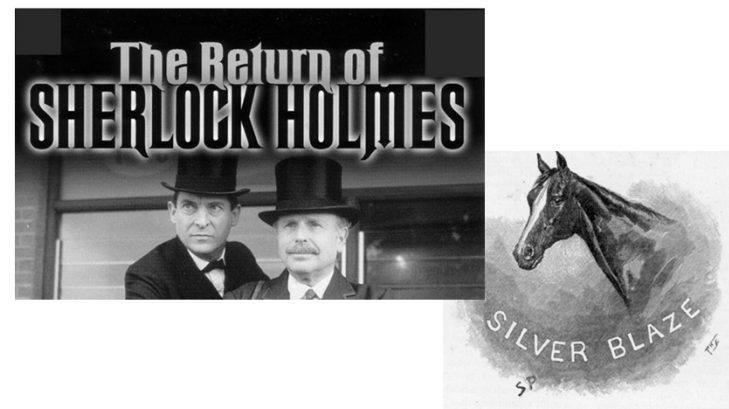
Iterative/Cyclical

Wallace's "Wheel of Science"



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Qualitative Analysis in Sherlock Holmes



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Sherlock Holmes

- Holmes had followed the case in the paper
- Upon arrival he surveys the scene, interviews the principals, and is very specific about what he asks (What was for dinner? Did you close door behind you?)
 - Seeks “rich description”; thinks re *process*
- He inductively generates theories *and* creates tests to see which rival explanations are most plausible

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Sherlock Holmes

- He starts by looking at the evidence that Inspector Gregory has gathered



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Inspector Gregory

The Inspector has a Theory



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Sherlock Holmes

- The curried mutton and the dog that didn't bark suggest to him it was an inside job. Was Mrs. Straker a part of it?



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Sherlock Holmes

If Straker had intended to harm Silver Blaze,
wouldn't there be evidence of it?



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Sherlock Holmes

But then where's the horse?
Looking for clues in the right places



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Sherlock Holmes

- The interview with Syllas Brown at Mapleton – “You’ve been watching me” – shows that Holmes is right about the horse
- But is he right about Straker, too?
- Not content with “shadow evidence,” he goes to London to see whether “Mr. Darbyshire” is actually Straker.

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Sherlock Holmes

Off to London to tie up loose ends, but not before
testing one last hypothesis



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Different Styles of Qualitative Analysis in *Silver Blaze*

Inspector Gregory:

- Gathers evidence
- Comes to a quick conclusion
- Is content with “shadow” evidence
- Does not look for negative evidence
- Remains purely inductive
- Lacks imagination
- Does not consider rival plausible explanations

Sherlock Holmes:

- Gathers evidence
- No premature conclusions
- Is not content with “shadow” evidence
- Is open to and seeks negative evidence
- Inductively generates a theory, then tests its implications deductively
- Considers rival plausible explanations

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Logic of Qualitative Inquiry

- Although fictional, Sherlock and Inspector Gregory have parallels in the real world
- The “qualitative research” you will do after you graduate will affect real people and change their lives

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What do these people have in common?



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Parallels

Wrongful Conviction:

- premature conclusions, tunnel vision
- coercion in interviewing, leading questions, false confessions
- conflicts of interest (e.g., gaol informants)
- confusing science and advocacy

Qualitative Principles:

- must consider rival plausible explanations
- assertive but unbiased; non-judgemental; guided by evidence
- must consider social location of participants
- reflexivity; the data must make a difference

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To Be Continued

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