

Criminology 321

Understanding Qualitative Approaches cont'd

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Howie Becker and “Crocks”

- Last day we talked about Sherlock and his investigative technique as an example of qualitative research, But what does this look like in the research world?
- Step 1: locate “the body,” i.e. find a focus
- A great example of a more inductive approach can be seen in Becker’s *How I learned what a ‘crock’ was*.

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Howie Becker and “Crocks”

- Starts off open-minded, perhaps even naively, gets lay of the land, basic story (people, activities)
 - “With no problem to orient myself to, no theoretically defined puzzle I was trying to solve, I concentrated on finding out what the hell was going on, who all these people were, what they were doing, what they were talking about, finding my way around and, most of all, getting to know the six students with whom I was going to spend the next six weeks.”

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Howie Becker and “Crocks”

- Listening to the vocabularies people use:

“One morning, as we made rounds, we saw a very talkative patient, who had multiple complaints to tell the doctor about, all sorts of aches, pains and unusual events. I could see no one was taking her very seriously and, on the way out, one of the students said, ‘Boy, she’s really a crock!’ I understood this, in part, as shorthand for ‘crock of shit.’ It was obviously invidious. But what was he talking about?”

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• Other examples?

- Police officers: Who are “scrots”?
- Students: What makes “A good course”? “A good prof”?
- Video Gamers: What makes “a good game”?
- Employees: What makes “a good job”?
- Sex Workers: Who is “a good trick”?
- These evaluative statements often tell you more about the person making the judgement than about what or whoever they are looking at.

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Howie Becker and “Crocks”

- But ... so what? If the concept is so important, what difference does it make in the lives of participants, i.e., how is it used, and how is it reflective of interests/action?

“...My problem was only half solved. I still had to find out why students thought crocks were bad. What interests of theirs was compromised by a patient with many complaints and no pathology?”

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Howie Becker and “Crocks”

- Becker then outlines how the concept of ‘crock’ relates to the interests and aspirations of the medical students, their views of medicine, their relationships with patients, and with each other.

“Intuitions are great but they don’t do much for us unless we follow them up with the detailed work that shows us what they really mean, what they can really account for.”

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Howie Becker and “Crocks”

- It’s only after completing the case study that you might ask about generalizability
- Two such considerations:
 - sampling generalizability (other persons/places/times, i.e., concept of external validity), or
 - theoretical generalizability (i.e., applicability of the concepts to other milieux)

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What does this mean to you?

- Spend time with your participants; pick a topic you’re actually curious about
- Do some exploratory work to try and figure out what is analytically “interesting” about the situation; think in terms of processes
- Talk to one person; listen to what they say. Then ask, “Who can you talk to next that is most likely to bring a new point of view?”

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Criminology 321

Ethical Principles in Social Research

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Ethics Principles

- Two fundamental principles that you undoubtedly will have to deal with are:
 - Free and informed consent
 - Confidentiality
- Another common one is:
 - Conflicts of roles/duties/interests, or what your text refers to as “Divided Loyalties”

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Free

- If consent is sought, it must first be “free”
 - Absence of coercion
 - Big concern when there is a power differential and potential conflict of roles, e.g., teacher/student, warden/inmate, therapist/client
 - Participants reminded that they are volunteering and need not answer all questions

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and Informed

- It must next be “informed”
 - who you are; what participation involves, and
 - any “reasonably foreseeable” risks or complications associated with these
 - what would you want to know if you or a family member were the one participating?
 - the exception? psychologists and their love of *misinformed* consent, i.e., deception

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Consent

May be obtained/inferred in different ways:

1. **Behavioral: opt-in** by signing a consent form, returning a survey, hitting “submit”;
2. **Implicit: opt-out** possibilities are provided and person does not do so (e.g., does not leave research site);
3. **Oral:** when signed consent culturally inappropriate, or there are good reasons for not recording opt-in or opt-out in writing

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Consent

- In qualitative research, consent is typically **oral**
 - The ideal relationship is one based on **rappport**, mutual **trust** and **respect**, not contract law
 - Written consent creates paper trails that undermine ability to maintain confidentiality
- **Current Issues**
 - Secondary data; linking diverse data sets beyond anticipated consent
 - Public/private on the world wide web

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Consent

- In most cases, research requires consent
- Do you *always* need consent? Not ...
 - when risk is minimal and obtaining consent impractical
 - when engaged in some forms of critical research
 - in public settings when data is anonymous and people are unaware of being observed for research purposes.

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Confidentiality

- A fundamental obligation. Probably the most important for social sciences, criminology
- We must be able to talk to people –justice personnel, offenders, victims – without them worrying about potential repercussions
- Your text is wrong when it says you are obliged to report crime; not that simple

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Confidentiality

- Criminology’s approach exemplified by ASC and ACJS *Codes of Ethics*:
 - “Confidential information provided by research participants must be treated as such by criminologists, even when this information enjoys no legal protection, and legal force is applied.” (Section 19)
- What if you hear about future crime?
 - Smith v Jones (1999) shows the way

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Confidentiality: Subpoena

- Commitment to confidentiality most directly challenged through subpoena
- In the U.S., subpoenas have arisen in two main contexts:
 - Legal authorities (esp. grand juries) looking for information useful in criminal prosecution
 - Civil litigation
- In Canada, up to 9 cases now

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Confidentiality: Subpoena

- Statute-based protections exist in the U.S.
 - Confidentiality Certificates for health (NIH)
 - Privacy Certificates for criminology (NIJ)
- In Canada, privilege is left to common law
 - Two kinds of privilege: class and case-by-case
 - Researchers should use the “Wigmore test” as a guide for designing research when disclosure could bring home to a participant

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Confidentiality

- Don’t get hysterical: subpoenas are rare events, and the court record is a good one
- More routinely, the biggest thing to remember is how to manage confidentiality in your research:
 - Confidentiality is the participant’s right
 - Don’t be a blabbermouth; don’t leave data around
 - Anonymize/encrypt wherever possible and as soon as possible
 - Don’t be as careless as our provincial government

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Confidentiality

- The researcher-participant relationship is unique -- *volunteer* participants entrust the details of their lives to us. Treat them with utmost care.
- Regarding confidentiality, be honest.
- If *not* prepared to offer unlimited confidentiality when the participant could be harmed, *do not do the research*, or alter its focus, because otherwise you put participants at risk. Only ask what you are prepared to defend; to do otherwise is exploitative.

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Conflict of Roles/Divided Loyalties

- Professionalization/proliferation of research skills/interests opens possibility for conflicts of interest
- Conflicting roles
 - What happens after the research is over?
 - Power dynamics of teacher/researcher, police officer/researcher, social worker/researcher, etc
 - Conflicting allegiances; conflicting standards (e.g., regarding confidentiality/disclosure/reporting)

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Conflict of Roles/Divided Loyalties

- Conflicting duties: TCPS is clear you must distinguish roles when professional/research standards may create a conflict:
 - “To preserve and not abuse the trust on which many professional relations reside, researchers should separate their role as researcher from their roles as therapists, caregivers, teachers, advisors, consultants, supervisors, students, employers and the like.” (p.2.4)

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Conflict of Roles

- Zinger was a PhD student at Carleton University while a CSC employee
- Did his dissertation (2001) on the effects of “administrative segregation” (i.e., solitary confinement)
- Limited confidentiality
- Results – self-serving; invalid

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Ethics Regulation

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Ethics Regulation

- Research ethics in criminology regulated by
 - disciplinary standards in Criminology such as those articulated by the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences and American Society of Criminology;
 - assorted SFU policies: primarily the SFU Research Ethics Policy (R20.01) and those concerning academic freedom, integrity
 - the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (TCPS) on ethics in research involving humans
 - your personal ethical standards

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The Regulation of Ethics

- Biggest thing to happen in Canada is development of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (1998, 2010, 2018)



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REBs and Qualitative Research

- Can't predict everything that will happen; we *hope* to be surprised
- Can't state all procedures ahead of time; collaborative designs (and qualitative ethics) require participant involvement
- Can't always identify sample ahead of time
- No rigid boundaries between “research” and other activities

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Ethics Review

- At SFU, all research with human participants must undergo ethics review and be approved before *formal* data gathering can begin
- I've been delegated review in Crim321
- Your proposals need to identify relevant issues *and* state how they are/will be resolved

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Proposal Reminder

- See Canvas for helpful instructions of what to include
- Submit to Canvas
- Never too late to send; projects cannot officially begin until approval has been received

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