



# Chapter 7

## Qualitative Methods and Data Analysis



# Three Major Designs

- **Participant Observation**
  - Develop sustained relationship with people while they go about their normal activities
- **Intensive Interviewing**
  - Open-ended, relatively unstructured questioning
  - Interviewer seeks in-depth information on the interviewee's feelings, experiences, and perceptions
- **Focus Groups**
  - Unstructured group interviews usually centered around specific topic of interest to the study
  - Lead by focus group leader, who is usually a researcher

# Common Features

- Collect primarily qualitative rather than quantitative data
- Inductive reasoning
  - May be exploratory
  - Researchers do not test preformulated hypotheses, but discover what people think and how they act in social settings
- Allows focus on previously unstudied processes and unanticipated phenomena
- Researchers pay attention to social context and interconnections between social phenomena
- Focus on events leading up to particular event or outcome, rather than search for general (nomothetic) causal explanations
- Reflexive research design – design is adjusted as study progresses, based on what researcher learns

# What is Field Research ? (04.07)

- Direct observation specific physical or social settings and the behaviors and events within them
- Because we are social scientists, this will always involve – to one degree or another – the study of human behavior, usually in social groups
- May study informal groups/situations (gangs) or formal groups/situations (police officers)
- Adjunct to other types of studies



# General Considerations in Field Research

- Subjects that can best be understood in their natural setting **and** the researcher can access that setting
- May take place in
  - informal groups/situations (e.g., gangs)
  - Formal groups/organizations (e.g., police departments)
- Behaviors that are not amenable to simple quantification (e.g., counting prevalence or incidence of some phenomenon)
- Can be an adjunct to a study that also uses quantitative methods



# Participant Observation

- All field research involves direct observation
- Researcher must determine how much involvement is needed and appropriate



# Complete Observation

- Researcher tries to see things as they happen, without actively participating in or disrupting these events
- May be interaction with subject(s) of study
- Subjects may not be aware they are being studied
- Common when observing specific types of events and behaviors that occur in public



# Advantages/Disadvantages of Complete Observation

- Will people act naturally knowing they are being watched?
  - **Reactive Effects** – people's actions are a reaction to being studied
- Researcher does not participate in illegal, unethical, or dangerous activities, but
- Researcher may observe illegal behaviors or dangerous situations. Should the researcher report?

# Advantages/Disadvantages of Covert Participation

- “**Going Native**” – researcher becomes so wrapped up in role that adopt not only outward trappings (e.g., clothing) but also the ideas and views of people being studied
- Cannot take notes or record conversations, must rely on memory
- Cannot ask questions that might reveal the fact that a research study is being conducted
- Danger to researcher and others
  - If others suspect the researcher’s identity or if the researcher contributes to, or impedes, group action, these consequences can be adverse
    - Can manipulate the group
    - Cause distrust of social scientists
- Ethical issues
  - Engage in illegal behavior
  - Deception
    - Participation by research ‘subjects’ is not voluntary
    - Researcher must determine deception is **necessary**, otherwise this role cannot be justified
    - Some researchers believe that it is never justified because the deception is unethical



# Covert (or Complete) Participation

- Researcher operates as fully functioning member of the group or social setting
- Most people being studied are usually not aware that they are being studied

# Mixed Participation and Observation

- Two types
  - Participate with group being studied, but make clear that you are also studying them
  - Observes and interacts, but does not participate in group
- Can combine roles
  - Inform some members of group about research
  - Participate enough to develop rapport and gain sense of what group members experience, but people know that you are not “one of them”



# Advantages and Disadvantages of Mixed Role

- Researcher can decline to participate in unethical or dangerous activities
- Because group members know the researcher's real role in group, they can choose to keep some information or attitudes hidden

# Entering the Field

- Read about the setting
- Find someone to get your “foot in the door” and show you the ropes
  - Gatekeeper



# Developing and Maintaining Relationships

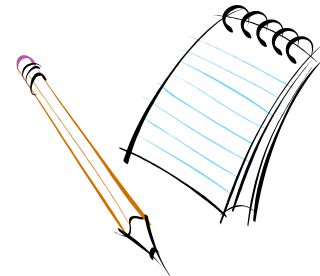
- Develop plausible and honest explanation for yourself and your study
- Maintain support of key individuals in setting
- Don't be too aggressive in questioning others, to the point that you violate local social norms
- Don't fake similarity with your subjects (don't "go native")
- Avoid giving and receiving money or gifts
- Be prepared for difficulties and tensions if multiple groups are involved, may be pressured to "take sides"

# Sampling People and Events

- Field research usually does not use probability sampling
- Major strategies
  - Snowball sampling
  - Theoretical sampling
    - Does not occur at beginning
    - Researcher learns of important processes during data collection and makes certain to sample enough people to investigate fully

# Taking Notes

- Primary method of recording participant observation data
- Usually a mistake to try to take comprehensive notes while engaged in the field because it is too disruptive
- Field researchers typically jot down partial notes while observing
- After leaving field, researchers retreat to their computer, hand-write or dictate more complete notes on a daily basis



# “Writing-Up” Field Notes

- **Field notes** must be as complete, detailed, and true to what was observed and heard as possible
- With the aid of the jottings and some practice, researchers usually remember a great deal of what happened
  - Write comprehensive field notes immediately afterward, or at least within the next 24 hours
  - Write field notes before they have been discussed with anyone else
- Usually, writing up notes takes at least three times longer than the field observation or interview did
- Original comments, observations, and feelings are reconstructed— or text transcribed from audiotapes.




# Techniques of Qualitative Data Analysis

- Documentation of the data and the process of data collection
- Organization/categorization of the data into concepts
- Connection of the data to show how one concept may influence another
- Corroboration/legitimization, by evaluating alternative explanations and disconfirming evidence and searching for negative cases
- Representing the account (reporting the findings)



# Conceptualization, Coding, and Categorizing

- Identifying and refining important concepts is a key part of the iterative process of qualitative research
- Conceptualization may begin with a simple observation that is interpreted directly, “pulled apart” and then put back together more meaningfully



# Examining Relationships and Displaying Data

- Centerpiece of the analytic process
  - allows the researcher to move from simple description of the people and settings to explanations of why things happened as they did with those people in that setting.
- The process of examining relationships can be captured in a matrix that shows how different concepts are connected, or perhaps what causes are linked with what effects



# Authenticating Conclusions

No set standards exist for evaluating the validity or “authenticity” of conclusions in a qualitative study, but the need to consider carefully the evidence and methods on which conclusions are based is just as great as with other types of research. Individual items of information can be assessed in terms of at least three criteria (Becker, 1958):

- How credible was the informant?
- Were statements made in response to the researcher’s questions, or were they spontaneous?
- How does the presence or absence of the researcher or the researcher’s informant influence the actions and statements of other group members?



# Reflexivity

- Confidence in the conclusions from a field research study is also strengthened by
  - honest and informative account about how the researcher interacted with subjects in the field
  - problems he or she encountered
  - how these problems were or were not resolved
- This “natural history” of the development of the evidence enables others to evaluate the findings



# Types of Data Qualitative Analysis

- Ethnography
- Ethnomethodology
- Qualitative Comparative Analysis
- Narrative Analysis
- Conversation Analysis
- Case-Oriented Understanding
- Grounded Theory

# Ethnography

- Study of a culture or cultures that a group of people share
- Naturalistic
  - Seeks to understand social world as it really is
- Major data collection technique is “being there”
- Analysis relies on thorough and insightful telling of the “story” of the culture/group being studied
- Strive for objectivity
- “...look for and recognize underlying assumptions, their own and those of their subjects, and to try to override the former and uncover the latter” (Anderson, 1999, p. 11).



# Ethnomethodology

- Focuses on how people construct their social world
  - How the social world becomes experienced as real
- Does not focus on merely describing or understanding the social world itself
- May not be an objective reality because people experience their worlds differently from each other

# Qualitative Comparative Analysis

- Usually focus on understanding a type of event or situation
- Explore structure and process by which events take place
  - The event is the dependent variable
  - Examine aspects of many multiple events/situations in detail to develop typologies to categorize similarities and differences across the events/situations
- Use information collected about the events to create and test a model of how these aspects/characteristics (independent variables) led to the event (dependent variable)

# Narrative Analysis

- Uses personal stories to understand social events and situations
- Stories tend to have characteristics of literature
  - Plot structure (whether story unfolds sequentially)
  - Dramatic tension (how the central conflict – the situation that the story is about - is represented)
  - Dramatic resolution (how the central conflict is resolved)
  - Predominant outcomes (how the story ends)
- People tend to tell several types of stories about an event
  - Action tales – author presents self and others as acting in usually, accepted manner in situation
  - Expressive tales – author expresses strong, negative emotional responses to someone who has wronged him/her
  - Moral tales – author recounts norms that shape his/her behavior and behavior of others
  - Rational tales – author represents him/herself as a rational decision maker



# Conversation Analysis

- Focuses on sequence and details of personal interaction in conversation to understand how people construct reality
- Three guiding premises
  - Interaction is organized sequentially and analyzed as a process
  - Talk is a process of social interaction that takes place within a social context
  - It is necessary to examine all details of social interactions to understand the situation



# Case-Oriented Understanding

- Attempts to understand a phenomenon from standpoint of the participants
- Attempts to develop complete understanding of situation as an example of some social phenomenon or event

# Grounded Theory

- Creation of **grounded theory** is the goal of much qualitative research
- Process of inductive reasoning
  - Refine definitions of problems and concepts and select indicators
  - Create theoretical models
  - Modify models as researcher gains experience in the setting
  - Check models carefully against notes to discover evidence suggesting model is incorrect
  - When models are not supported by data, refine the models

# Ethics in Qualitative Research

- **Privacy, confidentiality, anonymity**
  - How will study intrude and come closer than people might want?
  - How identifiable are individuals/organizations studied?
    - If confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, don't promise it
  - If confidentiality must be maintained, then it is possible that the researcher may have to omit some possibly important findings from the research report(s)
- **Intervention and advocacy**
  - What does the researcher do when she sees harmful, wrongful, or illegal behavior during a study?
- **Research integrity and quality**
  - Is study being conducted according to careful, thoughtful, and correct standards of behavior?
  - IRBs help ensure that this is true
- **Ownership of data and conclusions**
  - Who 'owns' the information collected?
  - Who controls how research results are disseminated/published?
- **Use and misuse of results**
  - Develop understanding with stakeholders that specify what actions will be taken to encourage appropriate use of data and to respond to misuse

*Address problems as they arise !*

# Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis

The analysis process can be enhanced in various ways by using a computer. Programs designed for qualitative data can speed up the analysis process, make it easier for researchers to experiment with different codes, test different hypotheses about relationships, and facilitate diagrams of emerging theories and preparation of research reports (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Richards & Richards, 1994).

The textbook uses two of the most popular programs to illustrate these steps:  
*HyperRESEARCH* and *QSR NVivo*

