

Research Methods

Lecture 7: Introduction to Qualitative Research
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Lecture outline

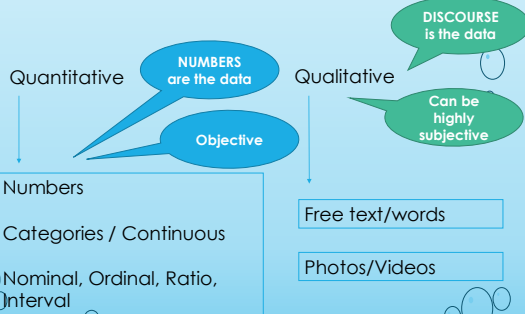
- Introduction to the role of qualitative research in psychology
- Discuss a number of qualitative methods
- Semi-structured interviews and question construction

RECAP

Different types of research:

- Basic versus applied research
- Qualitative versus quantitative
- Experimental V non-experimental

Qualitative and Quantitative data



Qualitative versus Quantitative research

◦ Quantitative research:

- We are not really interested in the sample that we study – we are interested in the target population
- Ability to generalise results to target population

◦ Qualitative research:

- Interested in the specific experiences of our sample
- the "life-world" of our participants
- Do not attempt to generalise to larger populations

What is qualitative research?

"Qualitative research is an enquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of enquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting" Creswell, 1998/2007

Your task... 5 minutes...

What is the best way to explore this research question?

"exploring the psychological benefits of owning pets"

Quantitative?
Qualitative?

What data would
you be looking
to obtain?

What questions do
you think you
would need to
ask?

What does qualitative research involve?

- An understanding of which approach you are following
- Significant amount of time spent gathering data
- Time-consuming and complex data analysis – reducing large sets of data to a few themes or categories
- Long pieces of text/writing incorporating quotes

Why conduct a qualitative study?

- In-depth exploration of a topic: often "how" "what" or "why"
 - How do people cope with undergoing genetic testing?
 - How do people feel about bullying?
 - What do people understand about migrants?
- Is there a lack of current theory/literature/evidence in the area?
- Do you want to study people in a naturally-occurring environment? e.g. in a self-help group

Qualitative research

- May be able to answer questions which large quantitative clinical studies cannot!
- Can provide an in-depth understanding of one particular phenomenon or specific beliefs or behaviour
- Qualitative findings can be used to raise awareness of experiences amongst many different professions

Validity?

◦ Describing and explaining the target phenomena

◦ **Fluid, flexible and 'open'** – less valid?

◦ Likely to be **led by participants'** interactions

◦ Methods designed so participants can challenge and correct assumptions

Validity?

◦ **Real-life settings** – higher ecological validity?

◦ Reflexivity – continually **reviewing own role** and its impact on the study itself

◦ Less likely to impose meaning on data

Reliability?

◦ Less emphasis on designs that will set parameters on likely responses

◦ Many qualitative researchers are less interested in reliability across studies...

◦ Focus instead on **the richness** of the data

Ethical issues

- Just as important in qualitative research, if not more so!

- **Informed consent**

- Before data collection

- **No deception**

- Can the research question be answered without deception?
- Do the potential benefits of the research outweigh the risks to participants?

- **Right to withdraw**

- At any time, without fear of penalty

Ethical issues

- **Debriefing**

- After data collection, participants should be informed of the full aims of the research
- Ideally also access to publications arising from that study

- **Confidentiality**

- Anonymity
- Care taken with materials
- Materials destroyed after completion of study

Ethical issues

- **Non-maleficence**

- We should avoid harming participants in any way

- **Beneficence**

- The research should provide positive and identifiable benefit – not just research for its own sake!

- **Autonomy**

- The participants values and decisions should be respected

- **Justice**

- All people should be treated equally



Questions?



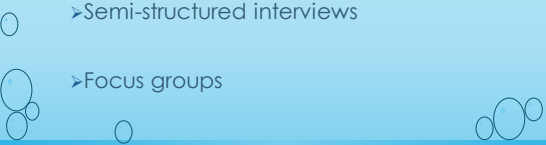


Qualitative data collection techniques





Qualitative data collection techniques

- Observations
 - In-depth interviews
 - Semi-structured interviews
 - Focus groups
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Observations

- Observational research can be useful in the early stages of research, helping to identify the parameters of a phenomenon
- Observational research tends to be high in **ecological validity** since observations are made in natural settings
- Host of **uncontrolled extraneous variables**

Interviews

- Not necessarily tied to any single approach, theory, etc.
- Flexible in format and function
- Data generated can be interpreted in a number of ways
- Direct interaction between research and participant
- The resulting account is the co-construction of both

Interviews

Unstructured Interviews:

- Avoids imposing researcher assumptions and expectations at the interview design stage
- A single prompt question may be used
- E.g.,
 - "I'm exploring people's experiences of unemployment and I'm interested in hearing about your experiences of being out of work."
- A few prompts prepared

Interviews

Fully-Structured Interviews:

- Rigid structure and order of questions

Semi-Structured Interviews:

- Key questions – allow for elaboration and some deviation
- Keep the main topic in focus – include pre-determined probes to contribute to answering the main question

Photo-elicitation Interviews:

- Use images as prompts
- Images may be interviewer-generated or participant-generated

Interviews

Semi-Structured Interviews:

- Neutral, open-ended questions aimed at eliciting in-depth responses from participants
- Questions form a prompt to the interviewer
- Should enable participants to express their beliefs, opinions and feelings freely

Interviews

Face-to-Face V Telephone Interviews

➤ Face-to-face interviews:

- Suited to exploring issues in depth
- Easier to fully engage in conversation/establish good rapport
- Can pick up on non-verbal cues – confusion, hesitation, anger, distress, etc...

Interviews

Face-to-Face V Telephone Interviews

➤ Telephone interviews:

- More cost effective/faster data collection (Breakwell, 2004)
- Fewer negative interviewer effects – visual cues cannot be observed (Groves & Jahn, 1979)
- Suitable when wide geographical location of target sample or resource constraints (funding, time, etc)

Questions?

Focus groups

- Group discussion of a small number of people who have something in common
- An ideal method eliciting people's own meanings and understanding of health and illness (Wilkinson, 2005)
- Allows individuals to interact with each other in response to a particular topic
- Make use of group dynamics to stimulate discussion, generate ideas and gain insights

Focus groups

◦ No "one 'right' way to do focus groups" (Morgan, 2008)

◦ Group size – suggested between 6 and 8 people (Wilkinson, 2003)

Participants responses are not always individuals, reasoned and rational

Co-constructed during the focus groups session – a result of the group discussion and interaction

Focus groups

◦ Additional ethical considerations:

◦ Confidentiality is expected of ALL members

◦ Respect to other speakers in the group

◦ Subtle and unobtrusive guidance – intervene only to maintain a productive group

◦ Diffusing difficult situations?

◦ Refocus the group

◦ Balance out the discussion

The growing role of mixed-methods research

