Introduction to Qualitative methods

Qualitative or Quantitative?

Qualitative

- Concerned with how people think and feel about the topics of concern to the research
- Gather broader, more in-depth information from fewer respondents (micro-analysis)
- Open questions for greater depth and personal detail

Quantitative

- Use a structured survey instrument that asks all respondents the same questions in the same order to allow for statistical analysis
- Gather a narrow amount of information from a large number of respondents (macro-analysis
- Closed questions for quantification, can be coded and processed quickly

Common misconceptions on Qualitative Research.

- As there is less participants, qualitative research is easier!
  - No, qualitative research (when done properly) is a time consuming piece of research.
- There is less research needed in the Introduction / Literature Review!
  - No.
- Qualitative Data is of less value and means less than Quantitative Data!
  - No, see Why use qualitative data on slide 8.

Ways of generating qualitative data

- What are the methods in which we can generate qualitative data?

Ways of generating qualitative data

- Interviews

- Focus groups
- Personal documents
- Naturalistic talk

- Therapeutic situations

Interviews

What Are Qualitative Interviews?

- "…attempts to understand the world from the *subjects' point of view*, to unfold the meaning of peoples' experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations"
- Conversations in which responses are the main source of raw data
  - Participant's *responses are open-ended* and not restricted to choices provided by the researcher

Kvale, Steinar. 1996. Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research. London: Sage.

Why Use Qualitative Interviews?

- May be the only data gathering technique for the study
  - Can lead to the development of new ideas and hypotheses, or to the discovery of new dimensions of a problem to be studied.
- Complements and supports other research methods
  - Can be used to develop valid and understandable questionnaires.
  - May be used as a follow-up to explore issues that have emerged from a questionnaire in more depth.

Miller, Robert L. and John D. Brewer. 2003. *The A-Z of Social Research*. London: Sage.

Different types of qualitative interview:

- One to one; one off (e.g. a case study)
- One to one; cumulative
- Group based (e.g. focus groups)
- Delivery or conduct of interview:
- Face to face
- By telephone
- By computer
- Structured/standardized (e.g. specific questions delivered the same way for each interview)
- Unstructured/nonstandardized (e.g. only a general set of questions that vary from interview to interview)

Interviews

- Informal – researcher is required to recollect discussion
- Unstructured – e.g. ethnographic interviewing – researcher allows interview to proceed at respondent's pace and subjects to vary by interviewee (to an extent)
- Semi-structured – researcher uses an interview guide
- Structured – researcher uses identical stimuli and adheres to interview schedule

Interview Guides / Schedule

- Necessary for the interview techniques discussed, but are used in different ways
  - Unstructured interviews
    - Allows the researcher to refer to key themes or sub-questions and formulate questions
  - Semi-structured interviews
    - Allows the researcher enough flexibility to re-word the questions to fit into the interview
  - Structured interviews
    - Resembles an interview schedule

Unstructured Interviews

- Interviews in which neither the question nor the answer are predetermined and rely on social interaction between the researcher and informant to elicit information (Minichiello 1990)
- A way to understand the complex behaviour of people without imposing any a priori categorization which might limit the field of inquiry (Punch 1998)
- A natural extension of participant observation relying entirely on the spontaneous generation of questions in the natural flow of an interaction (Patton 1990)

Zhang, Yan. 2006. *Unstructured Interview*.http://www.ils.unc.edu/~yanz/Unstructured%20interview.pdf

Structured / Semi-Structured

- Allow open-ended responses.
- Deliberately set up
- Follow certain rules and procedures.

Semi-Structured Interviews

- The researcher has an outline of topics or issues to be covered, but is free to vary the wording and order of the questions to some extent.
- Data somewhat more systematic and comprehensive than in the informal conversational interview.
- Tone of the interview still remains fairly conversational and informal.
- Requires an interviewer who is relatively skilled and experienced
- Difficult to compare or analyze data.
- The most frequently used qualitative interview technique

Structured Interviews

- Interviewer adheres to a strict script.
- Interviewers *can be* less experienced or knowledgeable.
- Easier to compare or analyze data

Task

- Individually – I want you to develop an interview schedule for the following research question.
- An investigation into perceptions and experiences of a male diagnosed with bulimia nervosa.
- You have access to a 15 year old male diagnosed with bulimia nervosa.
  - Aim is to conduct a case study to investigate the experiences of BN.

Focus Groups (Semi-structured)

- Recruited to discuss particular topic
- One focus group is ONE unit of analysis
- Complement surveys – often the 1st step in tapping critical questions to be used in a survey
- Identify why people feel certain way and elucidate steps in their decision-making process

Focus Group Methods

- Ideal size: 6 – 9 people and a moderator/note taker
- Series of groups is necessary for validity
- Homogeneity and anonymity in selection of groups

people may open up with others who are perceived to think along similar lines AND whom they may never see again

Focus Group Methods, cont.

- Often segment according to expected meaningful differences (e.g. disease status, gender…)
- Running a focus group – fine line between leading too much and not getting people to contribute
- Important to keep discussion on topic w/o shutting people down
- No right or wrong answers

Focus Group Methods, cont.

Coding/Analyzing

- Tapes are usually transcribed verbatim
- Text is sorted into emergent themes by at least 2 researchers to ensure validity
- Themes are compared with field notes taken by second researcher

Focus Group Methods, cont.

Thematic coding factors:

1. Frequency – number of times something is mentioned
2. Specificity – details
3. Emotion – enthusiasm, passion, etc. in responses
4. Extensiveness – how many different people said something

Questions on the Focus Group.

- In what situations do you think a focus group will be most appropriate form of data collection?
- What practical issues do you need to consider when developing a focus group?

Focus Group….

- Ice-Breakers.
- Although not essential, if you are gathering a group of relative strangers to discuss a particular topic a good way to start is by providing a few ice-breakers.
- I don’t mean ice-breakers in the traditional sense of the participants to get to know each other, but on the topic.

For Example

- Use a collage of images that may feature in the topic you want to discuss (use previous research to explore this) and ask participants individually to pick one and discuss what it means to them.

- Could also do with keywords.

For example

facebook
THE Sun
Daily Mail
YouTube
SYCOtv
BBC
Instagram
sky
THE TIMES
Microsoft
Google
WIKIPEDIA
The Free Encyclopedia

Structured Interviews

Questionnaires

Three methods:

1. Face-to-face interviews
2. Self-administered questionnaires
3. Telephone interviews

Face-to-Face Interviews (and intercept interviews)

Advantages:

- Can be used with respondents who wouldn't be able to provide information in another format – bedridden, illiterate, etc.
- Researcher can elicit more in-depth response or fill in information if participant doesn't understand the question
- Different data collection techniques – open-ended questions, visual aids, etc.
- Certainty about who answered the questions

Face-to-Face Interviews, cont.

Disadvantages:

- Intrusive and reactive
- Cost time and money
- Difficult to locate respondents for callbacks

Self Administered Questionnaires

Advantages:

- Post Office locates participants
- Everybody gets the same questions
- Researcher can ask more complex questions
- No response effect (willing to divulge more info w/o face-to-face contact; less likely to try to impress interviewer
- Can be computer-based

Self Administered Questionnaires, cont.

Disadvantages:

- No control over participant interpretation
- Low response rates
- Uncertainty about who actually filled out the questionnaire
- Useless with non-literate, illiterate populations (same problem with English language sampling) or hard-to-reach populations

Telephone Interviews

Advantages:

- Combo of face-to-face personal quality with impersonal self-administered questionnaires
- Inexpensive and convenient (maybe)
- Safe for interviewers

Telephone Interviews, cont.

Disadvantages:

- Changing demographics – more mobile phones?
  - May miss certain population segments
- Survey must be short or people will hang up
- “No Call Lists” presenting increasing challenge

Focus Groups vs. Surveys

- Surveys offer quantitative measurements based on a representative sample
- Focus groups offer content insight – the why of what people think

Task

What are the advantages and disadvantages of qualitative methods in Psychology?

Methods of Qualitative Analysis

- Thematic Analysis.
- Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
- Discourse Analysis
- Grounded Theory
- Ethnography

Discourse Analysis

- Discourse = Written or Spoken Communication or debate.
- Analysis = Analysing Written or Spoken Communication.
- The focus of discourse analysis is more linked to the language of the participant….

Discourse Analysis

- Discourse analysis is the study of social life, understood through analysis of language.
- Different communication styles of participants and how that might impact on the aspect being studied/researched.
- Looking beyond the literal meaning of language.

Example

- If there was a set text that described someone as a “terrorist” but another text that described the same person as a “freedom fighter” there would be very meanings.

- This is something that would interest discourse analysts –
  - How the message constructs a view of the world.

Important to Note

- Discourse Analysis will also focus on how information is said and also what information is NOT said.
- Sometimes defined as Language beyond the sentence.
- Used extensively in social psychology, but also becoming more widely used in health research.
  - E.g. Exploring issues in Doctor / Patient miscommunication etc.

Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967)

- Involves the construction of theory through the analysis of data……
- A popular approach in all facets of psychology
- Multiple data collection points are necessary.

Grounded Theory

- First step is to collect data…..
- Key points are marked with series of codes…
- From the codes, you form concepts….
- Then categories….
- Hypotheses are formed…..

Grounded Theory – Theoretical Sampling

- A **critical element** of Grounded Theory is Theoretical Sampling…..
- After the original categories are formed and hypotheses has been deducted the next stage would be to test the hypothesis via theoretical sampling….
- Selects sample according to the aims of the research AND to test the theory…. Coyne (1997).

Theoretical Sample

- For example, if the original analysis form the theory that Male cyclists who suffer an accident on the road will be more cautious upon their return and less confident of their abilities…..

- They will need a sample that can answer that theory AND ask questions to test their hypothesis.
  - E.g. Cyclists who have suffered an accident and ask them questions about their return.

Theoretical Saturation

- Another key element of Grounded Theory is that enough data needs to be collected at all stages so that a process of "theoretical saturation" has been achieved.

- Theoretical Saturation = "researcher has continued sampling and analyzing data until no new data appear and all concepts in the theory are well-developed" (Morse, 2004).

Can we ever get complete Theoretical Saturation?

- Big area of debate in qualitative psychology.
- As we know, individual differences makes it difficult to “prove” any theory…. So how can we ever attain a state of theoretical saturation.
- Perhaps if the topic is very specific it may be attainable.
- There is no magical number, although a Mason (2010) suggested the mean for doctoral thesis was 31 interviews for saturation to be achieved.

Topics that use Grounded Theory

- Grounded Theory is used in wide spread areas of psychology – most notably.

- Health Psychology
- Market Research
- Social Psychology
- Occupational Psychology
- Forensic Psychology

Strengths and Weakness of Grounded Theory

- Strengths

- An effective approach to build new theories and understand new phenomena
- High quality of the emergent theory
- Findings and methods are always refined and negotiated
- Requires detailed procedures for data collection, analysis and theorizing
- The resulting theory and hypotheses help generate future investigation into the phenomenon
- Requires the researcher to be open minded, and able to look at the data through many lenses
- Data collection occurs over time, and at many levels, helping to ensure meaningful results

Strengths and Weakness of Grounded Theory

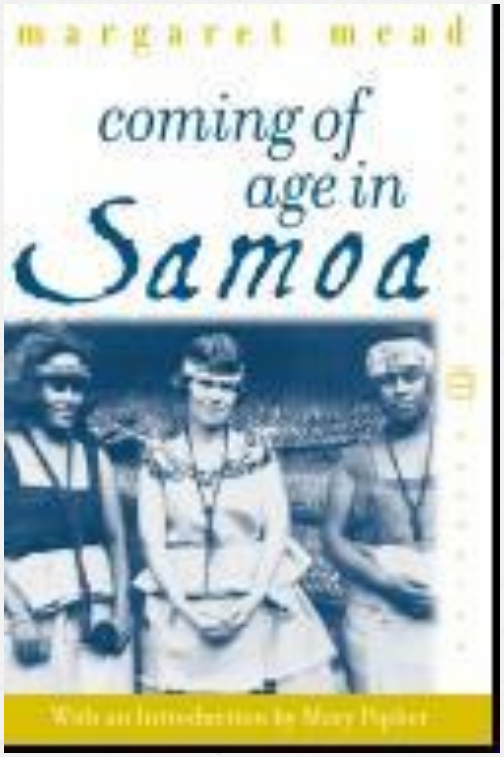
- Weaknesses:
- Huge volumes of data
- Time consuming and painstakingly precise process of data collection/analysis
- It may be difficult in practice to decide when the categories are “saturated” or when the theory is sufficiently developed
- It is not possible to start a research study without some pre-existing theoretical ideas and assumptions
- Requires high levels of experience, patience and acumen on the part of the researcher

Ethnography

- Systematic study of people and cultures.
- Researcher observes society from the point of view of the participant in the study.
- Particularly prevalent in anthropology
  - Study of human kind and cultures.
- However, has also been used in Psychology.

Ethnography

- Arguably the most famous case of ethnographic research was Margret Mead
- Wrote the book coming of age in Samoa in 1928. Which dialogued a findings of her ethnographic work in Samoa on adolescent development.
- Inspired a vast amount of research on the work of culture and personality.



Ethnography

- In addition, Malinowski's ethnographic research on Trobriand islanders provided a major critique of Freud's psychosexual theory.
- Relationship between Father and Son and Father and Uncle…. Very different to that of Europe.

Characteristics of Ethnography

- Holistic
- Data collection and analysis occur together
- Data collection fluctuates between individuals and groups (Fetterman, 1998)

Fieldwork Methods of Ethnography

- Selection and sampling
- Participant observation
- Interviewing
- Autobiographical interviewing
- Questionnaires
- Existing documented information
- Folktales
- Notes, notes, notes!!!

Strengths of Ethnography

- In-Depth understanding of a culture amongst a group of people (detailed and more likely valid interpretations)
- Gives a voice to a culture to express their views, which might not otherwise be heard
- Influential in creating an understanding among outsiders
- Also may reveal embedded cultural values that were not obvious to the group

Weakness of Ethnography

- Cumbersome and Time-consuming, and can be expensive
- Possibility that researcher is changing the natural way a culture behaves by being present
- Not really able to generalise findings
- Difficulty of reconciling constructive engagement with critical reflection
- Bias!