

Advanced Psychological Science Qualitative Methods – Week 1 – Lecture and Tutorial Notes

Qualitative Philosophy and Ethics

What is Qualitative Research?

- “Research which is based on rich textual rather than numerical data”.
- “Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practises that make the world visible. These practises transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to self”.
- “An array of alternative approaches to those in the mainstream”.

Big Q and Little Q

- Two meanings to the term ‘qualitative research’.
- **Little q** – incorporation of non-numerical data collection methods into hypothetico-deductive research designs e.g., some open-ended questions on a questionnaire; is a post-positivist approach.
- **Big Q** – open-ended, inductive research methodologies aimed at uncovering meanings and generating theory.

Characteristics of Qualitative Methodologies

- Takes place in naturally-occurring settings.
- Is emergent rather than tightly prefigured.
- Is contextual and holistic.
- Is fundamentally concerned with meaning.
- The researcher reflects on his/her role in the research.
- Has distinct methodological traditions.

Strengths of Qualitative Methodologies

- May identify the variables or suggest the hypotheses to be tested in subsequent research.
- May develop new theories.
- May challenge the status quo and identify new directions of inquiry.
- Provides rich descriptions of complex phenomena.
- Elicits participants’ own categories of meaning.
- Provides contextualised data.
- Captures dynamic processes.

Limitations of Qualitative Methodologies

- May be seen as less credible by administrators/funding bodies.
- Longer time for both data collection and analysis.
- More difficult to compare findings across studies.
- Can’t account for cause and effect relationships.

Context

- It is important to consider the context in which we embark on the study of qualitative research methods.
- Context is everything.
- “...psychology courses devoted to qualitative practices are indeed rare...”.
- Despite the increasing popularity of qualitative inquiry practices in psychology, this approach is considered by some as ‘alternative’ and ‘unscientific’.

Quantitative	Qualitative
<i>What is it?</i> Concerns the ‘observable’ and ‘measurable’.	<i>What is it?</i> Concerns the study of context, interactions between people and the environment, explores subjective experiences.
<i>What do research questions sound like?</i> Emphasise causality, involves posing hypotheses.	<i>What do research questions sound like?</i> Cannot be answered by ‘yes’ or ‘no’, they are not hypotheses; broad, with a focus on depth.

<i>How do you do it?</i> Experimental/quasi-experimental research designs.	<i>How do you do it?</i> Exploratory research designs.
<i>What does the data look like?</i> Often numerical (reducing surveys, experiments to numbers).	<i>What does the data look like?</i> Often textual: field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, videos, observation, media, books, focus groups...and more!
<i>What is the researcher's role?</i> The observer is independent of the observation.	<i>What is the researcher's role?</i> A participant may even become a researcher, and vice versa.
Objectivist/logical positivist.	Subjectivist/constructionist.

Mistakes We Make When Teaching Qualitative Research Methods

- Presenting a qualitative vs. quantitative divide.
- Over-homogenising qualitative research methods.
- Presenting qualitative research methods as 'tools' or 'techniques'.
- Failing to explore the epistemological and ideological underpinnings of qualitative inquiry.
- "All claims to knowledge carry implicit values, and thus favour certain ways of life over others."
- Qualitative inquiry practices cannot be reduced to tools or techniques. Qualitative inquiry is a worldview.

History in Psychology

- 1800s:
 - Gustav Fechner: experimental psychology (stimulation and sensation).
 - Wilhelm Wundt: first psychology laboratory (introspection).
 - Franz Brentano: consciousness/intentionality.
 - William James: basic phenomenology of self.
 - Sigmund Freud: dream analysis (idiographic).
- 1900s:
 - Study of personality (idiographic).
 - Behaviourism.
 - Rejection of first person perspective, perceptual approach, ideography, meaning and social relatedness.
 - Described psychology as "a purely objective experimental branch of natural science".
 - Participants were referred to as 'reagents'.
 - Psychology should only be about observable behaviour – humanistic psychology, cognitive psychology, and the helping professions are obstacles in the path of psychology as science of behaviour.
- 1970s:
 - Cognitive revolution.

History – Other Influences

- 1800s:
 - Edmund Husserl: Phenomenology.
- 1900s:
 - George Herbert Mead: Symbolic interactionism.
- 1920s-30s:
 - Chicago school.
 - Ethnographies of groups on margins of society and 'deviance', e.g. gangs, prostitution, homelessness.
 - Participant observation, life-histories, document analysis.

Other Historical Influences

- Second Chicago school.
 - Post World War II.
 - Ethnographies of deviance.
 - Becker: *The Outsiders*.
- UK 1960s.
- National Deviancy Conference (1968).
 - Most famous Stanley Cohen's work on Mods and Rockers including concept of moral panics.
- Cultural and indigenous perspectives.

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