

# Qualitative Research

## Qualitative Research

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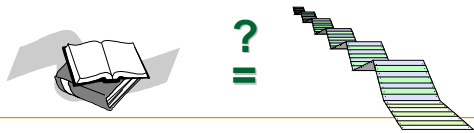
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### Comparing Qualitative and Quantitative Methods

Before discussing the differences between qualitative and quantitative methodologies one must understand the foundational similarities.



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### Foundational Similarities

- All qualitative data can be measured and coded using quantitative methods.
- Quantitative research can be generated from qualitative inquiries.
- Example: One may code an open-ended interview with numbers that refer to data specific references, or such references could become the origin of a randomized experiment.

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# Qualitative Research

## Foundational Differences

- The major difference between qualitative and quantitative research stems from the researcher's underlying strategies.
- Quantitative research is viewed as confirmatory and deductive in nature.
- Qualitative research is considered to be exploratory and inductive.

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## In other words...

- Qualitative studies lead to the creation of theories that describe some aspect of reality
  - these theories may later be tested and confirmed
  - yield rich data of explanatory depth
- Quantitative studies test theories and effects or measure some aspect of reality
  - yields thin data that lacks depth
  - Think Video vs Photograph

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## Qualitative Research

- Terminology
- Methods
- Strengths and Weaknesses



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# Qualitative Research

## Terminology

- Grounded Theory
- Ethnography
- Phenomenology
- Field research

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## Grounded Theory

- Grounded theory refers to an inductive process of generating theory from data.
- This is considered ground-up or bottom-up processing.
- Grounded theorists argue that theory generated from observations of the empirical world may be more valid and useful than theories generated from deductive inquiries.

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## Grounded Theory (con't)

- Grounded theorists criticize deductive reasoning since it relies upon a priori assumptions about the world.
- However, grounded theory incorporates deductive reasoning when using **constant comparisons**.
- In doing this, researchers detect patterns in their observations and then create working hypotheses that directs the progression of the inquiry.

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# Qualitative Research

## Ethnography

- Ethnography emphasizes the observation of details of everyday life as they naturally unfold in the real world. This is sometimes called naturalistic research.
- Ethnography is a method of describing a culture or society. This is primarily used in anthropological research.

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## Phenomenology

- Phenomenology is a school of thought that emphasizes a focus on people's subjective experiences and interpretations of the world.
- Phenomenological theorists argue that objectivity is virtually impossible to ascertain, so in order to compensate, one must view all research from the perspective of the researcher.

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## Phenomenology (con't)

- Phenomenologists attempt to understand those whom they observe from the subjects' perspective.
- This outlook is especially pertinent in social work and research where empathy and perspective become the keys to success.

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# Qualitative Research

## Field Research

- Field research is a general term that refers to a group of methodologies used by researchers in making qualitative inquiries.
- The field researcher goes directly to the social phenomenon under study, and observes it as completely as possible.

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## Field Research (con't)

- The natural environment is the priority of the field researcher. There are no implemented controls or experimental conditions to speak of.
- Such methodologies are especially useful in observing social phenomena over time.
- A good example: Jane Goodal and her research on chimps

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## Methods

- Participant Observation
- Direct Observation
- Unstructured or Intensive Interviewing
- Case Studies

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# Qualitative Research

## Participant Observation

- The researcher literally becomes part of the observation.
- Example: One studying the homeless may decide to 'walk the streets' of a given area in an attempt to gain perspective and possibly subjects for future study.

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## Direct Observation

- Direct observation is where the researcher observes the actual behaviors of the subjects, instead of relying on what the subjects say about themselves or others say about them.
- Goodal has effectively lived with the chimps under study for over 30 years. She has become a member, albeit an odd one, of their society.
  - She gathers data from within the context and her interactions add to the observed data

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## Unstructured or Intensive Interviewing

- This method allows the researcher to ask open-ended questions during an interview.
- Details are more important here than a specific interview procedure.
- Here lies the inductive framework through which theory may be generated.

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# Qualitative Research

## Case Studies

- A particular case study may be the focus of any of the previously mentioned field strategies.
- The case study is important in qualitative research, especially in areas where exceptions are being studied.
- Example: A teacher may work in an unusual setting -- tiny school, and we may seek to understand how this working environment is experienced.

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## Strengths and Weaknesses

- Objectivity
- Reliability
- Validity
- Generalizability

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## Objectivity

- It is given that objectivity is impossible in qualitative inquiry. Instead the researcher locates his/herself in the research.
- Objectivity is replaced by subjective interpretation and mass detail for later analysis.

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# Qualitative Research

## Reliability

- Since procedure is de-emphasized in qualitative research, replication and other tests of reliability become more difficult.
- However, measures may be taken to make research more reliable within the particular study. (i.e. Observer training, more objective checklists, etc.)

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## Validity

- Qualitative researchers use greater detail to argue for the presence of construct validity.
- Weak on external validity.
- Content validity can be retained if the researcher implements some sort of criterion settings.
- Having a focused criterion will add to the study's validity.

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## Generalizability

- Results for the most part, do not extend much further than the original subject pool.
  - However, the resulting theoretical contract may serve as a powerful guide to future thought and research
- Sampling methods determine the extent of the study's generalizability.
- Quota and Purposive sampling strategies are used to broaden the generalizability.

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# Qualitative Research

## Summing Up

- Remember that there are always trade-offs in research.
- Are you willing to trade detail for generalizability?
- Will exploratory research enable you to generate new theories?
- Can I ask such sensitive questions on a questionnaire?

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## Summing Up (con't)

- Will the results add any evidence toward any pre-existing theory or hypothesis?
- Is FUNDING available for this research?
- Do I really need to see numbers to support my theories or hypotheses?
- Are there any ethical problems that could be minimized by choosing a particular strategy?

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