Research Methods: Qualitative Approach

Sharon E. McKenzie, PhD, MS, CTRS, CDP
Assistant Professor/Research Scientist
Coordinator Gerontology Certificate Program
Kean University
Dept. of Physical Education, Recreation and Health
Qualitative & Quantitative Data

• Data are the evidence.

• Methods are the tools for data collection.

• Methods are typically linked to Worldviews (paradigms)
  ◦ Represent broad assumptions about how project should be done
    • positivist worldview (paradigm)
    • interpretive paradigm

Newman, 2012
Qualitative Design

- Use cases and context to examine social processes
- Looks at interpretation or the creation of meaning in specific settings
- Look at social life with multiple points of view
- Look at how people construct identities
- Rarely use variables or test hypotheses
- See data as highly meaningful**

Newman, 2012
Inquiry approaches

- **Phenomenology Studies**
  - Obtaining authorities’ verbal descriptions base on their perceptions of a phenomenon
    - Aim is to find common themes or elements that comprise the phenomenon
  - Discover and describes the elements (texture) and underlying factors (structure) that comprise the experience of the researched phenomenon
  - Use in-depth interviews

Marques & McCall, 2005, p. 444
Inquiry approaches...

**Grounded Theory**

- Theory developed during data collection process
- Theory built from data or grounded in the data
- Conceptualization and operationalization occur simultaneously with data collection and preliminary data analysis
- Open to unexpected
- Builds theory by making comparisons
- Ponders questions and looks for similarities and differences

Newman, 2012
Inquiry approaches...

- **Case Studies**
  - An in depth exploration of a program, activity, process, or one or more individuals
  - Cases bounded by time and activity
  - Researcher collect detailed information using variety of data collection procedures over a period of time

- **Narrative studies**
  - In depth study of the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives
  - Information is retold or re-storied by researcher into a narrative chronology
  - Incorporation of participant’s life with those of researcher’s (collaborative narrative)

Creswell, 2009
Qualitative data are empirical

- Documenting real events
- Recording what people say (with words, gestures, and tone)
- Observing specific behaviors
- Studying written documents
- Examining visual images
- “hard” data to measure attitudes, social pressure, intelligence and the like
Qualitative Research

• Provides opportunity for the researcher to step beyond the known and enter into the world of the participants
• See the world from the participant’s perspective
  ◦ Interested in how persons experience events
  ◦ Interested in the meanings that they give to experience of events
  ◦ Examine the context in which those experiences are framed or embedded
  ◦ Describe the process or ongoing and changing forms of action/interaction/emotions taken in response to events and problems that arise to inhibit action/interaction
  ◦ Make discoveries that will contribute to the development of empirical knowledge

Corbin & Strauss, 2008
Why do qualitative analysis?

- Research question should dictate the methodological approach used to conduct the research
- Qualitative research allows researchers to get at the inner experience of participants
  - Determine how meanings are formed through and in culture
  - Discover, rather than test variables
- Qualitative research is fluid, evolving, and dynamic
- Leaves room for discovery
- Provides opportunity for the researcher to connect with the participants at a human level
- Get to play with words making order out of dis-order
- Thinks in terms of complex relationships

Corbin & Strauss, 2008
Qualitative Conceptualization

- Researchers refine rudimentary “working ideas” during the data collection and analysis process.
- Conceptualization is a process of forming coherent theoretical definitions as one struggles to “make sense” or organize the data and one’s preliminary idea.
  - Concepts and evidence are treated as mutually interdependent.
- New concepts and definitions are developed during the gathering and analysis.
- Concepts are then linked to create theoretical relationships that may or may not be causal.

Newman, 2012
Qualitative Operationalization

- Researcher forms conceptual definition out of rudimentary “working ideas” used while making observations or gather data
- Researchers operationalize by describing how specific observations and thoughts about the data contributed to working ideas
- An after-the-fact description more than a before preplanned technique
- Data gathering occurs with or prior to full operationalization

Newman, 2012
Context is critical

- Emphasize the social context for understanding the world
  - What came before OR what surrounds the focus of study
  - Same events or behaviors can have different meanings in different cultures or historical eras
    - What is the meaning and importance of certain traditional healing practices and how does it impact on healthcare use among Haitian born older adults?

(Newman, 2012)
Case and process

- Cases same as units of analysis (or unit on which variables are measured)
- Use “case-oriented” approaches
  - Focus is on the cases (older Haitian adults)
  - Focus on “contingencies” (i.e., the co-occurrence of many specific factors and events in one place and time)
- Gives detail and insight into the cases (as oppose to statistical analysis of precise measures)
- Sequence of events important (first event, second, etc.)
  - Examine same cases or sets of cases over time
  - Able to see issues as they evolve

(Newman, 2012)
Interpretation

- Assign significance or a coherent meaning to something
- Meaning is achieved by rearranging, examining, and discussing textual or visual data in a way that conveys an authentic voice, or that remains true to the original understandings of the people and situations that he or she studied.
- Translates the originally gathered data

(Newman, 2012)
Stages of Interpretation

- First-order interpretation
- Second-order interpretation
- Researcher tries to elicit an underlying coherence or sense of overall meaning in the data
- Links the understanding to a larger concept, generalization, or theories

(Newman, 2012)
Two simultaneous activities occur as you code:
- Mechanical data reduction
- Analytic data categorization

- Open Coding
- Axial Coding
- Selective Coding

Marques & McCall, (2005)
Reliability in qualitative research

- Inter-raters engage in attentive reading
- Inter-raters have basic agreement/understanding of topic
  - Apriority Guide
- Inter-rater reliability used as a *Solidification* tool that will contribute to quality of study
  - Verification of findings during the process of the study
  - Prior to formulating final conclusions

Marques & McCall, (2005)
Validity of qualitative research

- Certain measures taken to ensure validity
  - Triangulation
  - Respondent validation
  - Clear exposition of methods of data analysis
  - Reflexivity
  - Attention to negative cases
  - Fair dealing

Mays & Pope, 2000
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test hypothesis that the researcher begins with</th>
<th>Capture and discover meaning once the researcher becomes immersed in the data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Concepts are in the form of distinct variables</td>
<td>Concepts are in the form of themes, motifs, generalizations, and taxonomies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures are systematically created before data collection and are standardized</td>
<td>Measures are created in an ad hoc manner and are often specific to the individual setting or researcher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data are in the form of numbers from precise measurement</td>
<td>Data are in the form of words and images from document, observations, and transcripts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory is largely causal and is deductive</td>
<td>Theory can be causal or noncausal and is often inductive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures are standard, and replication is assumed</td>
<td>Research procedures are particular, and replication is very rare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis proceeds by using statistics, tables, or charts and discussing how what they show relates to hypotheses</td>
<td>Analysis proceeds by extracting themes or generalizations from evidence and organizing data to present a coherent, consistent picture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Newman, 2012)
Some References