

Qualitative Research and Observing Behavior

Some review...

- Science is **empirical** = based on experience
- historically, psychology was founded on the study of human experience
 - e.g. William James and the Stream of Consciousness, Wundt and introspection

Impact of Behaviorism

- emphasis on measurable, observable data
- very quantitative in nature...
- ...though not exclusively



A comparison

- Sue's cumulative GPA = 3.21
- Sue is a very bright but rather undisciplined student. She shows a great deal of curiosity and passion for specific subjects, periodically displaying brilliant insight far beyond what is typical of undergraduates. She also tends to avoid routine work and is often disorganized.

Quantitative Approach

- Numerical in nature
- Tends to approach a population
- Uses objective measurement
- Often makes predictions

Qualitative Approach

- Verbal or image-based data
- has an individual focus
- Subjective reports
- Goal is to find meaning or understanding of a phenomenon
 - phenomenological view

Which approach to use?

- It depends on the question being asked

Examples:

- Are children of parents who suffer from depression more likely to experience depression themselves?
- Why do people seek help for depression?
- What percentage of older adults suffer from depression?
- What is it like to live with a depressed spouse?

Collecting qualitative data

- Use open ended questions.
- Allow person to put experience in their own words.
- Describe what you see, rather than look for particular behaviors.
- Keep detailed notes.

Coding qualitative data

- might have preconceived categories
- might look for emerging themes in the data

Limitations of qualitative research

- generalizability
- prediction

Qualitative Data Collection

- Naturalistic/Laboratory Observation
- Archival Data
- Interview/Survey
- Survey

Limitations of Observation

- Participation
 - Nonparticipant = outsider
 - Participant = loses objectivity
- Concealment
 - can minimize reactivity...
 - ..but nonconcealed observation may be preferable from an ethics viewpoint

Qualitative Methods

- Case Study
- Phenomenological Inquiry
- Grounded Theory
- Ethnography

Case Studies

- Case studies are done when an individual possesses a particularly rare, unusual, or noteworthy condition.
 - A *psychobiography* is a type of case study in which a researcher applies psychological theory to explain the life of an individual
- Includes interview, observation, archival data, and perhaps other quantitative measures

Phenomenological Inquiry

- What is this human experience *like*?
- assumes human experience is unique and subjective
- importance of bracketing
- can use interview and archival data

Grounded Theory

- Might ask “How does this happen?” or “Why does this occur?”
- observations and interviews aid understanding
- goal is that theory will emerge that is grounded in the data

Ethnography

- study of a culture from the perspective of individuals in that culture
- important to recognize own cultural biases and lens
- interview, observation, archival data