**PSY 326 Research Methods Week 3 Guidance**

Welcome to Week 3 of Research Methods! This week, you will learn about a few of the most popular qualitative research designs. Required resources are sections 3.1, 3.2, and the parts of section 3.4 about “Pros and Cons of Observational Research” and “Types of Observational Research” in the Newman (2016) textbook, an ebook chapter by Levitt (2016), and two videos about qualitative research. The videos are linked in the Course Materials and the discussion prompt.

Assignments for the week include a discussion, an interactive learning activity and quiz, and a written assignment. To see how your assignments will be graded, look at the rubrics accessible through a link on the screen for each discussion or assignment.

The Week 3 discussion is **Pros and Cons of Qualitative Research**. Your initial post is due by Day 3, and all replies are due by Day 7. To prepare for the discussion, read the sections of the Newman (2016) textbook listed above, the Levitt (2016) book chapter, and the lecture portion of this instructor guidance. Also, view the videos ***Different Qualitative Approaches*** (Kawulich, 2013) and ***When to Use a Qualitative Research Design: Four Things to Consider*** (Zhang, 2017), which are linked in the Course Materials and the discussion prompt.

This week’s discussion assignment is a jigsaw puzzle. Instead of having the entire class read and report on four different qualitative research designs, each person will research and report on one specific design. Designs are assigned based on the first letter of your last name. When you determine your assigned design, use the Research Methods research guide and the databases in the Ashford University Library to find at least one scholarly/peer-reviewed article about the research design AND at least one published research study that used the design. Then, explain the characteristics and features of the research design and what kinds of topics it can be used for, describe the data collection and data analysis methods used in the design, and discuss the published study you found. Document your sources in APA style.

At least three replies to the initial posts of classmates will be required for this discussion, because you must read and respond to at least one post about each of the other three qualitative research designs. As the expert on your assigned design, you will also be expected to respond to some of the questions posted on your thread by others. See the discussion prompt for complete details.

After you have learned about qualitative research from the assigned readings and participating in the discussion, you will be ready to do the interactive activity and take the quiz called **Qualitative Research Fundamentals**, due by Day 6. In the first part of the learning activity, match terms related to qualitative research with their definitions. In the scenarios presented in the second part of the activity, you must select the most appropriate qualitative research design for the situation. After mastering the interactive activity, take the graded quiz. As with all quizzes in this course, you may retake it as many times as you wish until the end of the course to improve your score. Your highest score will be retained.

The written assignment is a **Qualitative Research Critique**paper, which is due on Day 7. Review the assigned readings, videos, and discussion forum posts. The assignment prompt also provides links to Writing Center and Library resources on how to read a scholarly article and write a critique, which will be helpful to view before starting the assignment. Your instructor will post an announcement with the reference for the assigned article to be critiqued. Retrieve the article from the Ashford University Library, and also download the Qualitative Research Critique Template provided in the Course Materials and the assignment prompt. The template is set up in APA format with a series of questions to answer about the assigned study. Submit your completed template form to Waypoint.

After completing this instructional unit, you will be able to:

* Explain the distinguishing features of qualitative research.
* Identify the key features, pros, and cons of selected qualitative research designs.
* Critique a qualitative research study.

Keep these objectives in mind as you go through this week’s learning activities.

Qualitative research is not an experiment. It does not involve manipulating anything or controlling extraneous variables in a laboratory setting. Qualitative research is holistic. You may have heard the centuries-old story about a group of blind men trying to describe an elephant. They all felt different parts of the elephant. The one who felt the elephant’s trunk concluded that an elephant was like a thick snake. Another, who felt the elephant’s side, said that an elephant was like a wall. A man who felt the elephant’s ear was sure that an elephant was like a fan. One who felt the tusk stated that the elephant was like a spear, and so on.

Each of the blind men only perceived one part or aspect of the elephant, and they argued about which one of them was right. They were all partially correct, but none of them really understood what an elephant was because they did not have the whole picture. In a way, this piecemeal approach is like quantitative research, which parses information about thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and objects into segments called variables. If all the relevant variables are not included in a quantitative study, the results might not present the whole truth. In contrast, qualitative research tries to consider the whole phenomenon in its context.

Qualitative research focuses on “what” and “how” types of questions. It is not about finding out the right answer, but about understanding the perceptions and perspectives of other people, as individuals or in groups. One of the features of the qualitative approach is that researchers acknowledge that they see the world from behind a lens composed of their upbringing, culture, language, and experiences. Because everyone has such a lens, yet every individual’s lens is unique, it is important for researchers to be aware of how their lenses color their perception and understanding of what they see and hear from the participants. The effort to recognize one’s own lens and biases is referred to as reflexivity (Levitt, 2016; Roberts, 2009; Tickle, 2017). Making an effort to identify and set aside potential biases is called bracketing (Levitt, 2016). A person’s worldview, which includes the cultural lens, beliefs about the nature of reality, and beliefs about the nature of knowledge, is called a paradigm. Certain paradigms are associated with particular qualitative research approaches. For more information about paradigms, see the article by Ponterotto (2013) or other sources about the philosophy behind qualitative research.

Sampling in qualitative research tends to be purposive instead of random or by convenience. Participants are selected because they have knowledge or personal experience with the topic of the study, and are willing and able to communicate in depth about it. Sample sizes are smaller than in quantitative studies. It is common not to set a desired sample size ahead of time in qualitative research. Often, researchers rely on data saturation to determine when the sample is large enough. Data saturation is the point at which no new information or insight is added from additional interviews or observations. One sampling strategy used when the topic is sensitive and locating qualified participants may be difficult, is called snowball sampling. This involves asking each participant to refer someone they know who is qualified and might be interested in participating.

A qualitative researcher’s goal is to describe observed phenomena, behaviors, or situations in rich detail in words or pictures. This is called thick description. While quantitative research uses deductive reasoning, qualitative research typically uses inductive reasoning, which goes from the specific to the general. In induction, the researcher starts with pieces of data, then finds how they are connected in patterns. Another feature of qualitative data analysis is constant comparison. Instead of collecting all of the data before beginning analysis (as must be done in quantitative research), data from each individual source is analyzed as soon as possible after collection, and the findings are compared with and added to findings from the other sources in the study. The process of data analysis involves at least three steps: coding, categorizing, and generating themes. Codes are labels for significant statements or observations found in the raw data. Categories are clusters of related codes. Themes are meanings or insights that go across codes and categories.

In some qualitative studies, the researcher may send the analysis or findings to participants to get their feedback on the accuracy of the researcher’s understanding of the data. This is called member checking or respondent validation. Trustworthiness is a term usually used in qualitative research instead of the quantitative terms validity and reliability. The qualitative concept of trustworthiness includes the components of credibility (comparable to internal validity), transferability (comparable to external validity), and dependability (comparable to reliability). Trustworthiness is supported by thick description, reflexivity, bracketing, and member checking. Four of the most popular qualitative research approaches are ethnography, grounded theory, narrative research, and phenomenology.

Ethnography focuses on a culture-sharing group and how the group works, including core values and beliefs. The researcher collects data over an extended period of time, with a combination of observation, interviews, and document analysis. There are different types of observation, including non-participant and participant observation (Roberts, 2009). Non-participant observation is unobtrusive observation without interaction between the research and the people being observed. Participant observation is when the researcher not only observes the behavior and activities of participants, but also joins in the activities as part of the group. Data analysis for ethnography includes description of what was observed; analysis of the observations, documents, and interviews with key informants to determine the rules and patterns of the culture; and interpretation to form a word picture of the culture as a whole.

Grounded theory is a qualitative approach that aims to generate a theory based on data collected (Levitt, 2016). It is usually used to study a process or the way in which something happens. Qualitative research studies do not start with a hypothesis, but a grounded theory study might formulate a hypothesis as its final product, to be tested later in a quantitative study. Grounded theory uses multiple forms of data collection (Marjan, 2017), including interviews with individuals, focus groups, observation, and content analysis of documents. Data analysis usually uses at least three kinds of coding: open coding (codes, categories, and themes), axial coding (causal conditions, strategies, intervening conditions, and/or consequences), and selective coding (developing hypotheses).

Narrative research focuses on the story of one individual. Most data collection is from in-depth interviews, but observation can also be added. The researcher gets the participant’s life story or the participant’s experiences related to a specific topic, directly from the participant (Levitt, 2016). During data analysis, one or more epiphanies are identified and situated in context.

Phenomenology is similar to narrative research, except that it involves more than one individual participant. In phenomenology, a small number of people who have experience with the topic of the study are interviewed individually. The aim of phenomenological research is to get the insider’s perspective, the lived experience, or the worldview of a person in the situation of interest (Levitt, 2016). Bracketing is essential, as the researcher must consciously set aside his or her own perspective to be able to see and understand the perspective of the participant.

If you have any questions about this week’s readings or assignments, email your instructor or post your question on the “Ask Your Instructor” forum. Remember, use the forum only for questions that may concern the whole class. For personal issues, use email.

References

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