

Week 3: February 8, 2008

Qualitative Methods: Observing, Interviewing and Documenting, Part II

“Lady, I do not make up things. That is ‘lies.’ Lies are not true. But the truth could be made up if you know how. And that’s the truth!”

Lily Tomlin, (Actress, Comedienne), in her “Little Girl” role

Announcement about Labs

Next week we will meet at the lab, not the classroom (I’ll give out the door codes today):

Section 4 (9 – 11:30) meets at Industrial Studies (IS) 134

Section 3 (1:30 – 4:15) meets at Wash Square Hall (WSQ) 208

Include memos; rhetoric; writing up qualitative research

Terms and concepts you should know:

- Self reflective notes
- Thematic analysis
- Coding
- Content analysis
- “Quantifying” qualitative data
- Unit of analysis (in content analysis)
- Manifest content
- Latent content
- Observation protocol

I. Ethnography (or Naturalistic Inquiry)

A. Ethnographic methods are relevant if you choose to observe a setting for Assignment #2

B. “What is the culture of this group of people?”--this study is a description and interpretation of a cultural or social group or system. The researcher examines the group(s) observable and learned patterns of behavior, customs, and ways of life, usually through extended exposure to the group(s).

C. Method for Ethnographic Study

1. **Observation Protocol** – a way to structure your field notes and description of the observation. It has two main parts:

- a) Description of what you observe (what people do, what they say, thick description of the setting). May also include sketches of the setting.
- b) Self reflective comments—what you think about the observations, how you explain them, questions that come up for you

2. Analysis and Interpretation

- a) Address your original research questions (if you have any): what do the data tell you about them?
- b) Summarize your observations in narrative format
- c) Include reflective comments in order to make sense of the observations
- d) What was expected and unexpected about what you observed?

D. Method for Oral History—Narrative Approach—See instructions for Assignment #2

II. Field Notes

A. **Field notes** – a description of what you have observed. They can take the form of an Observational Protocol (see above), or the notes you take during an interview.

B. Question: *How much should you try to write down?*
Answer: *As much as possible!*

C. Important tips:

1. During the interview or observation, write key words and phrases about what you observe and what the respondent says—words and phrases you can understand later
2. Complete your field notes as soon as possible after the interview (preferably immediately afterwards), by adding more text to the key words and phrases, as well as other thoughts that occur to you
3. Whenever possible, use direct quotes from the respondent to maintain fidelity to the respondent's voice
4. Note—audio taping an interview does not take the place of taking field notes

D. Questions to consider:

1. What does this description of fieldnotes have to do with scientific inquiry?
2. What are the similarities and differences of the purposes of fieldnotes to what you are learning about social work practice?

3. How might fieldnotes fit into your Method section?
4. If you were asked to write a brief paragraph on your personal biases or hidden assumptions about your topic area, what would it say?
5. How much do you identify with the population you would be studying?

E. Example of Field Notes: Interview question: “What’s it like coming to see your caseworker every week?”

1. Field notes written during interview:

R. likes C.; AA--understands; hates waiting room—“feel criminal”

[R. = Respondent; C = caseworker; AA = African American]

2. Completed version of field note: *Respondent likes her caseworker. She feels caseworker understands her family’s issues and is not judgmental, partly due to the caseworker also being Black (“She’s been through this herself.”) But the Respondent has a strong negative reaction to the waiting room and office environment. “Everybody makes me feel like a damn criminal!” I could see her point—when I came to the office to meet her, the staff seemed rude to others waiting whereas I received deferential treatment. Also, there were no person-friendly or culture-friendly decorations, pictures, etc. only a posting that said “Client’s Rights and Responsibilities.” Her statement “feel like a criminal” may also be her own view about herself as well (“criminal”) based on her comments earlier in the interview...*
3. What are the important themes in this brief fieldnote?

III. Content Analysis

A. **Content analysis** – A research method for studying virtually any form of communication consisting of coding and tabulating (counting) the occurrences of units content. (Otherwise known as the process of “**quantifying data that are qualitative**”)

1. **Manifest content** -- Units of content can be words or phrases as they appear—the obvious and clearly evident aspects of the communication.
2. **Latent content** – Units of content can be underlying themes or meanings, not necessarily obvious from the actual words
3. **Unit of analysis** in content analysis – what is to be counted

B. Questions to consider:

1. How is content analysis different from the qualitative data methods we have talked about so far?

2. What are the “quantitative” and “qualitative” aspects of content analysis?
3. Think of an example at your field placement where content analysis might be useful.
4. How would content analysis be applied to observing the behavior or culture of a group?
5. Would content analysis fit at all in your project?

IV. Interpretation and Writing Results

A. Interpreting qualitative data

1. **Self reflective notes** -- when reading the transcriptions or field notes, writing more specific types of notes showing the researcher’s preliminary interpretive thoughts, done during the analysis stage of grounded theory, though one can do this for any qualitative approach. Think of this as writing notes to yourself.
2. **Thematic Analysis** -- thematic analysis involves a systematic inspection and interpretation of ideas, concepts, and trends in qualitative data. In qualitative research the narrative of this process explains themes and examples extracted from this data to answer the overarching research question(s), report other information originally unanticipated, and expounds on the findings relevance. Can be used interchangeably with “coding.”
3. **Coding** (in qualitative analysis) – often used interchangeably with “thematic analysis”, coding is the process of flagging words, phrases, or latent content and assigning them to one or more categories of information.

B. Writing a Qualitative Report

1. Compared to a quantitative one, qualitative reports are very individualized, depending on
 - a) The qualitative approach (narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, ethnography, case study)
 - b) The extent to which the “voices” of respondents are represented (emic) vs. the researcher’s (etic)
 - (1) Use of quotes
 - (2) Vignettes
 - (3) Other media representing the setting and respondents
 - (4) Researcher’s self reflective comments

- c) The types of research questions addressed
 - d) The audience of the report
2. What if you are doing a mixed methods report (combining qualitative and quantitative components)? The choices are:
- a) Having two separate Results components of your report, one answering the quantitative research questions, and the other answering the qualitative research questions, but with only one Discussion section
 - b) Combining components in one Results section

Class Process Questionnaire -- ScWk 242 Sections 3 & 4

Date of Class: _____

Instructions—near the end of class or at anytime after class please complete *any* of these questions and return to the Instructor. **This is *not required* for grade or class participation.** Do not put your name on this sheet.

1. At what point in this class did you feel most engaged?
2. At what point in this class did feel the least engaged?
3. What action or discussion by anyone in the room did you find most helpful?
4. What action or discussion by anyone in the room did you find most confusing?
5. What surprised you most about class today?
6. Is there a topic that we should definitely get back to in the next weeks? Or, any particular types of teaching techniques you would recommend?