



SOWK 459  
Fall 2019

Jacob Campbell, LICSW  
- Heritage University

# QUALITATIVE INQUIRY

INTERPRETIVE INQUIRY

# Agenda

- \* Students will describe the key elements of interpretive research including methods, sample selection, and data analysis.
- \* Students will analyze interpretive research.



# The Interpretative Approach to Research

## Positivistic Approach to Infidelity

Track the number of people who engage in infidelity and how often they stray.

Conduct a survey and look patterns among different variables defined at the start.

## Interpretative Approach to Infidelity

Study the meaning attached to cheating and look for patterns and trends.

Interview cheaters:

- What comprises “cheating”?
- Is it sex, or texting someone of the opposite sex?
- Is there a continuum?
- What meaning do we make from these behaviors?



# The Interpretative Approach to Research

## Positivistic Approach to Prisons

Measure the conditions of federal prisons

Identify variables to measure conditions, such as square feet per inmate, number of hours in isolation, housing conditions,... etc.

## Interpretative Approach to Prisons

Explore the experience of prisoners and/or guards and administrators.

Research participants would explain their experiences, and the researcher would assign meaning to them. She might look for themes across interviews to interpret the experiences of multiple research participants.

This is **experience-near** and **in a context** (prisons).



# The Interpretive Approach to Research

**Interpretive methods** focus on the meaning-making practices of human actors. Rather than trying to define reality, interpretive methods explore how we make meaning, or interpret reality.



Called **qualitative research** in some disciplines, it is conducted from an "experience-near perspective" – the researcher does not start with concepts observed and measured with the senses. Rather, she allows concepts to emerge from encounters in "the field."



# Five Approaches to Interpretive Inquiry

## **METHODOLOGIES OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**



Approach	Data Collection	Sample	Data Analysis	Final Product
<p><b>Narrative</b> Explore the life on an individual</p>	Interviews and documents	Typically one (sometimes more) person	“Restorying,” developing themes, often use chronology	Narrative about the stories of an individual’s life
<p><b>Phenomenology</b> Understand the essence of an experience</p>	Interviews, documents, observations	Several individuals with the same lived experience	Looking for significant statements, meaning units, describing the “essence”	Description of the “essence” of an experience
<p><b>Grounded Theory</b> Develop a theory from data from the field</p>	Interviews	Typically 20 to 60 individuals	Coding, looking for themes, tying themes into a theory	Generation of a theory illustrated in a figure
<p><b>Ethnography</b> Describe and interpret a culture-sharing group</p>	Primarily observations and interviews	One culture-sharing group	Deep description, identifying themes	Description of how a culture-sharing group works
<p><b>Case Study</b> Provide an in-depth description of a case or group of cases</p>	Multiple sources (interview, observation, documents, etc.)	Event, program, or activity	Describing the case, identifying themes (cross-case themes)	Detailed analysis of one or more cases



# Three Key Interpretative Methods

## Participant Observation

The researcher observes participants in their natural environment, often times as a participant herself



## In-depth Interview

The researcher asks several, open-ended questions to explore participants' personal histories, experiences, and perspectives

The researcher asks in-depth questions of small groups of participants to explore their experiences, perspectives, and cultural norms



## Focus Group





# Characteristics of the Interpretive Approach

- \* Studies conducted in the “natural setting” of participants
- \* Variables cannot be controlled and experimentally manipulated
- \* The questions are not always completely defined when research begins
- \* Data collected are heavily influenced by the experiences and priorities of research participants (they participate in the process of research)
- \* Meanings are drawn from the data using processes that are natural/familiar (for example: observations and interviews rather than experiments)



# Data Collection Principles

Researcher must be aware of her own biases and intentional about describing them

Data collection is often collegiate, where research participants share their stories and the researcher is upfront about her understanding/interpretation

Many studies depend upon multiple sources of data (different groups of participants) and multiple collection methods (interviews and observation, and analysis of documents).



# Methods for Making Meaning

The goal of an interpretive study is to identify relationships between the major themes that emerge from the data. How do we do this?

- Use diagramming and other visual techniques to spatially sort themes according to how related they are
- Look for missing links
- Count the number of times a theme appears
- Note contradictory evidence



# Benefits and features of interviews

- \* Useful for exchanging complex information versus operational definitions
- \* You can ask follow-up questions
- \* People's stories
- \* Lengthy explanations
- \* Participants can reflect out loud about their responses
- \* Studying processes



# The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers

Interview Transcript – A Teacher's  
Observations of Child Oppression

[https://study.sagepub.com/node/  
31740/student-resources/chapter-5](https://study.sagepub.com/node/31740/student-resources/chapter-5)

