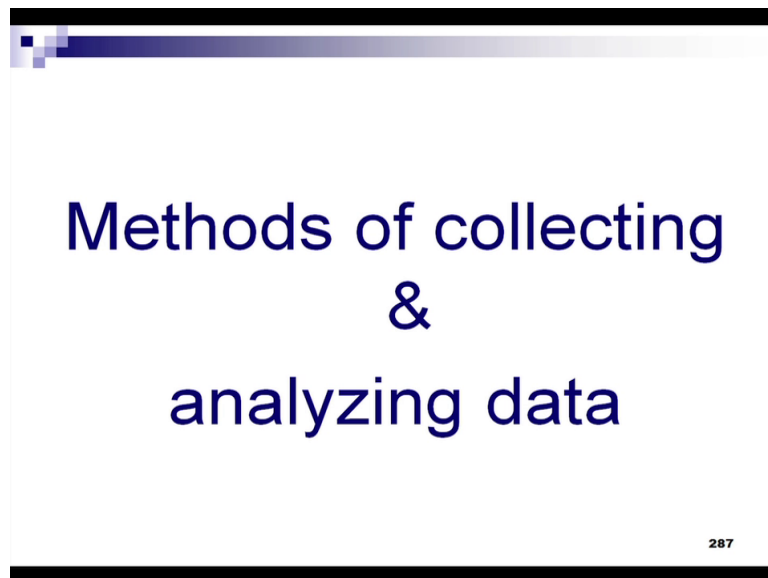


Qualitative Research Methods
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Lecture 29
Observations

Welcome back to the NOC course title qualitative research methods, my name is Aradhna Malik and I am helping you with this course and we have covered what qualitative research is, we have covered the paradigms and perspectives, we have covered the strategies of inquiry, today we are going to move into this new module called methods of collecting and analyzing data

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Now we know what qualitative research is and how it takes place and what are the different frames of reference that we can use to carry out qualitative research. Now let's see how we can actually go into the field and start collecting data, we will talk about the different ways of collecting data, analyzing data, etcetera in this module, okay. So methods of collecting the first method, that we will talk about in this series of lectures is observation.

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Observation

(Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000)

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And this is again a paper by Angrosino and Mays de Perez from the book called handbook of qualitative research methods edited by Denzin and Lincoln, this is the book that shown you many times earlier on and so this is their take what observation is, anyone who has gone into the field knows what observation is.

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Assumptions

(Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000)

- Observation is the “... fundamental base of all research methods in the social sciences.” (Adler & Adler, 1994, in Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000)
- Observations are usually rendered as descriptions
- Observers try & maintain objectivity as far as possible. They never become a part of the situation that they are observing even if they participate to understand it better.

According to critics, it is impossible to observe the situation/ phenomenon objectively because the observer *is* influenced by the observed.

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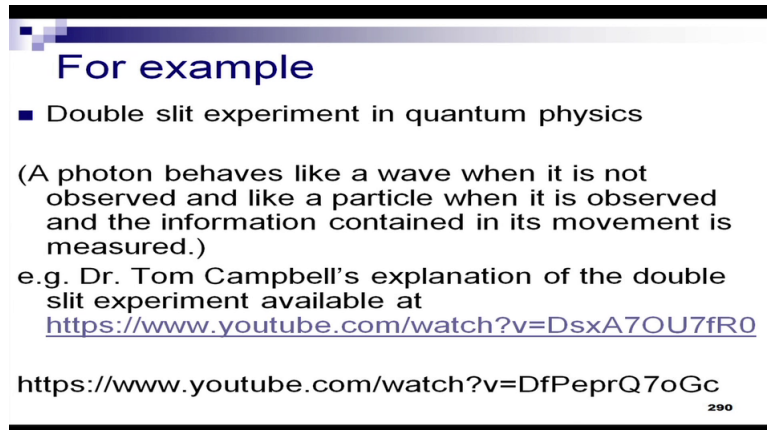
So let's just start with the assumptions, now observations when we talk about observations we assume a few things, we start with some basic premises, the first assumption here is that, observation is the “fundamental base of all research methods in the social sciences.” Fundamental it is there any kind of research in the social sciences takes place, so it is the very, very, basic, very rudimentary, the first you know the first strategy, the first method that used for data collection is observation, we see what there is to see.

Observations are usually rendered as description, so what do we do after we see and observe something, we purposefully notice direct our attention to what up, to the object of our research and then we describe whatever it is that we are attending to, we described whatever it is that we have focused our attention on.

Then the third assumption is that observations, observers try and maintain objectivity as far as possible, so observers try and cover as many aspects of the observed and the assumption here is that observers never become a part of the situation that they are observing even if they participate to understand it better.

And this is where the whole discussion on qualitative research methods rests. Critics say qualitative researchers accept that as hard as we may try, it is impossible to observe the situation of phenomenon objectively, because the observer is influenced by the observed and observed is influenced by the observer and that is really what this whole discussion is all about. We can try as hard as we might, but when we know we are being observed things change.

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For example

- Double slit experiment in quantum physics

(A photon behaves like a wave when it is not observed and like a particle when it is observed and the information contained in its movement is measured.)

e.g. Dr. Tom Campbell's explanation of the double slit experiment available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DsxA7OU7fR0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DfPeprQ7oGc>

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For example there is a very classic problem in physics and that is the double slit experiment in quantum physics, I do not have the time or the permission to show this whole thing to you, but and I provided the links here and you know there is there is a movie called What the bleep do we know about the rabbit hole and the second link here is from that movie and the premise of this and the first one is doctor Tom Campbell's explanation of the double slit experiment which is available at this link.

So you can watch it yourself and see if I can show you a brief clip, but then that really you know we will see how much we can cover, but the double slit experiment in quantum physics deals with the fact that a photon behaves like a wave when it is not observed and like a particle when it is observed and the information contained in its movement is measured. So when the information, this is Talk to Tom Campbell's explanation of the double slit experiment, which is baffled scientist for years.

And he says that when the information contained in the movement of a photon is measured, it starts behaving like a particle, but when a photon is not observed, when the information contained in a photon is not measured then it behaves like a wave, so it's very, very interesting my suggestion is that you watch these clips, let me show you what they look like.

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(Lecturer playing the video clips)



So you don't mix up things here, so let's play this one, I won't show you Doctor Tom Campbell explanation with this clip, this is from a movie called what the bleep do we know about the rabbit hole.

(Video from the link begins 05:45)

We are the granddaddy of all quantum weirdness, the infamous double slit experiment, to understand this experiment, we first need to see how particles or little balls of matters tack. if we randomly shoot the small object say a marble at the screen, we see a pattern on the back wall, where they went through the slit and hit. Now if we add a second slip we would expect to see a second band, duplicated to the right.

Now let's look at waves, the waves hit the slit and radiate out, striking the back wall with the most intensity directly in line with the slit, the line of brightness on the back screen shows that intensity, this is similar to the line the marbles make, Ah! When we add the second slit, something different happens, if the top of one wave meets the bottom of another wave, they cancel each other out, so now there is an interference pattern on the back wall.

Places where the two tops meet are the highest intensity, the bright lines and where they cancel there is nothing, so when we throw things, that is matters through two slits we get this. Two bands of this and with waves we get an interference pattern of many bands, good so far. Now let's go quantum economy, an Electron is a tiny, tiny bit of matter, like a tiny marble, let's fire stream through one slit, it behaves just like the marble, single band.

So if we shoot these tiny bits through two slits, we should get like the marbles two bands, what!! An interference pattern, we fired electrons, tiny bits of matter through, we get a pattern like waves, not like little marble, how? How could pieces of matter create an interference pattern like a wave, it doesn't make sense, but there's a sister clever, they thought maybe those when the little balls are bouncing off each other and creating that pattern.

So they decide to shoot electrons through one at a time, there is no way they could interfere with each other, but after an hour of this, the same interference pattern is seen to emerge, the conclusion is inescapable, the single electron leaves as a particle, becomes a wave of potentials, goes through both slits and interferes with itself, to hit the wall like a particle, but mathematically it's even stranger, it goes through both slits.

And it goes through neither and it goes through just one and it goes through just another, all of these possibilities are in superposition with each other. But scientists are to go completely baffled by this, so they decided to peek, see which slit actually goes through, they put a measuring device by one slit, to see which one it went through and let it fly, but the quantum world is far more mysterious than they could have imagined.

When they observe the electron went back to behaving like a little marble, it produced the pattern of two bands, not an interference pattern of tiny. The very act of measuring or observing which slit it went through, meant it only went through only one, not both. The electrons decided to act differently, so it was aware, it was being watched, it was here the physicists

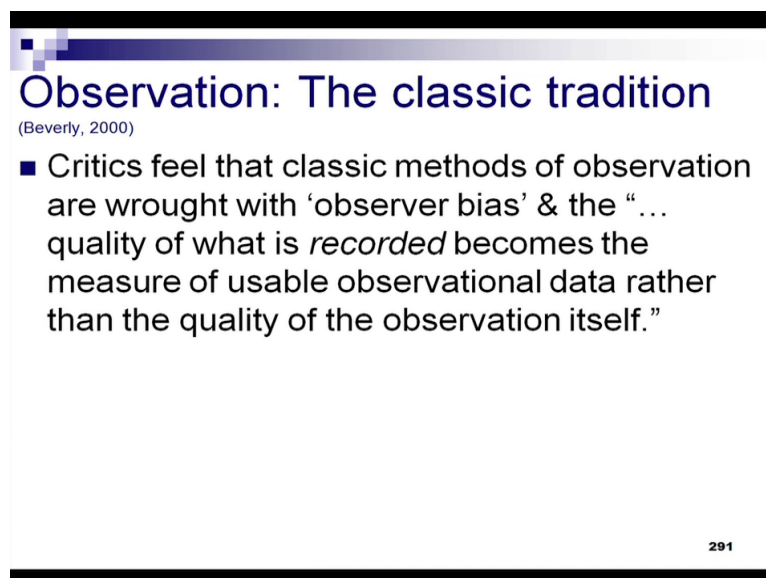
stepped forever into the strange never world of quantum events, what this matter? What this for waves? And waves of what? And what these observers have to do with anything, the observer collapses the wave function, simply by observing.

(Video from the link ends: 10:41)

Okay, so this even though this experiment does not directly relate to research, to qualitative research but the point I'm trying to make here is that when the observers, when the observed knows that the observed is being observed, the tendency to project, desirable behavior or the tendency to project behavior, that can be measured increases.

So that is one very big critique of observation and this particular experiment shows you that you know of course it doesn't relate to this, this has baffled scientists for years, they don't know why this happens but still even matter has a tendency to behave differently, this is just exhibit how matters can behave differently, when the behavior of matter is observed.

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So you know observation: the classic tradition, critics feel that classic methods of observation are wrought with 'observer bias' and the "quality of what is recorded becomes the measure of useable observational data rather than the quality of the observation itself." So they feel that whatever is recorded is because observation is rendered in and through description, the biased of the observer comes into play, the biased of the observer becomes very, very it starts affecting what is being observed and that in turn affects the output of the research.

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Categories/ stages of participants

(Gold, 1958, in Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000)

- Complete participant
- Participant as observer
- Observer as participant
- Complete observer

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Some categories or stages of participants, you can have a complete participant, you can have participant as the observer, you can have observed as a participant and you can have a complete observer. So the observers can be complete participants and participants can be complete observers also.

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Rethinking observation as a context of interaction

(Beverly, 2000)

- Characteristics of contemporary ethnographic research:
 - "... The increasing willingness of ethnographers to affirm or develop a 'membership' role in the communication they study
 - The recognition of the possibility that it may neither be feasible nor possible to harmonize the observer & the 'insider' perspectives so as to achieve a consensus about ethnographic truth; &
 - The transformation of the erstwhile 'subjects' of research into ethnographers' collective partners.

Then let's think observation or let us try and see observation from the perspective of interaction after all observation involves some amount of interaction, so some characteristics of contemporary ethnographic research are "the increasing willingness of ethnographers to affirm or develop a 'membership' role in the communication they study.

Second characteristic is the recognition of the possibility that it may neither be feasible nor possible to harmonize you observe and the insider perspectives so as to achieve a consensus

about ethnography truth; first one is you know ethnographers want to become members in the situation they are studying, the second characteristic of contemporary ethnographic research is, that it may not be possible for the researcher to completely balance out the perspectives of the observer.

And the members or to completely bring them at par with each other, because a person who is going in with the option, with the clear goal of observing a situation in mind will pick up different things, from the same situation than the insider web.

Third characteristic here is so a consensus may never be reached, the third characteristic is that the transformation of the erstwhile subjects of research into ethnographers collective partners. The subjects of research are always you know ethnographers are always trying to integrate the subjects of research into the research itself as their partner, so that is the another characteristic here.

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Principles of social interaction relevant to observation as a tool for collection of qualitative data (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000)

- **Conscious Adoption of a Situational Identity:**
 - "... The basis of social interaction is the decision (which may be spontaneous or part of a careful plan) to take part in a social setting rather than react passively to a position assigned by others."
 - Problem: Very thin line between participant observation & actual involvement.

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You know principles of social interaction relevant to observation as a tool for collection of qualitative data, the first principle is conscious adoption of a situational identity: the researcher assumes is specific identity in the situation, so they try and find out what kind of you know which role they will play well, whether they will be participant, whether they will not be participant, just an observer, what kind of role are they going to play in the research.

"The basis of social interaction is the decision which may be spontaneous or part of a careful plan to take part in a social setting rather than react passively to a position assigned by

others.” So the researchers carefully fix the situation that they want to observe the situation from. Problem with this is that there is a very thin line between participant observation which means you participate in.

But still you are constantly filtering out things that may not be relevant to your research and the actual involvement, where you become a member. But how do you balance the two, is the real problem here, what do you do? Where do you balance the two? So that becomes a problem.

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Principles of social interaction relevant to observation as a tool for collection of qualitative data (Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000)

- **Conscious Adoption of a Situational Identity:**
 - “... The basis of social interaction is the decision (which may be spontaneous or part of a careful plan) to take part in a social setting rather than react passively to a position assigned by others.”
 - Problem: Very thin line between participant observation & actual involvement.

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The next one is perception of power: “in most social interactions, people assess behavior not in terms of its conformity to social or cultural norms in the abstract, but in regard to its consistency, which is a perceived pattern, that somehow make sense to others in a given social situations.”

Anybody who is participating in a social situation as used a position in that social structure anybody who is participating in a situation becomes a participant in that particular situation, anybody who is participating knows where they stand and the others in the social situation also know where they stand, so there is a perception of power, there is you know where not really power but your exact location in that social environment.

This principle discusses the difference between ideal and real culture. Ideally I would like to be on the fringes I would like to do this, I would not like to do this, but because of the social

dynamics, the way the interaction structured and the social situation my position is determined by a lot of factors as a researcher.

No set norms are followed in a culture - there are or deviations as a culture lives and progresses. So when the researchers try to find out the ideal or representative, they could end up constructing a virtual community. I would like to do this, big deal, you know so I would like to do it, but then will the social environment allow me to do whatever I would like to do, that is determined by the dynamics, the kind of social interaction that goes on in that situation.

Would you really be allowed to do it, will the situation permit you to do it without disturbing the status quo, it what is becomes the question, if we stay, very stuck on as researchers, if we are very, very firm about, we are not very adaptable as to where are position will be, then we are not really observing a real situation, we are creating a virtual situation, the ideal situation for observation of something.

That we would like to do and this is the problem that crops of when people go and with this very explicit motive of observing something, with a very clear closed ended questionnaire in hand. We will discuss interviewing also and will realize that open ended questions, unstructured questionnaire and unstructured questionnaire is most useful in observational settings, where you have some idea of where you're going.

But you should observe things as they go on. Observation means that there is no real structure is exploratory, the purpose is to find out what is there, you know it's not okay I am going in I want to pick this in fitted into particular category, no. I will go in and see and then I will draw category around if required.

Gender may influence, now we will talk about this even when we talked about interviewing the gender of the person observing is likely to influence what is and can be observed, availability of observation opportunities to male and female observers will differ, from situation to situation, you want to see children playing in a school, you just want to see how children behave in a preschool, women will be preferred more in that situation, let's be honest about it.

People are you know, children get scared, when they see tall men with you know with big moustache's they may get scared, but women are like you know like mother figure, they will, even if you don't interact with them, female observers will have a better, will have an advantage over male observers if they want to observe children in a school. Similarly we want to know how say you know if you want to observe the living conditions of our defense forces, for example in the field.

Men will be preferred more because there are men all around, so they are not you know they don't stand out, so male observers can just go in and rugged conditions in, where is a woman suddenly appearing in the middle hundred soldiers' their eyes will be reverted to the woman and the woman poor thing will not be able to observe things in the natural setting, because suddenly somebody new has come.

So and then they will not even accept that a woman is able to climb those rocks and do things and you know there's a will not be able to observe things in the natural settings. Where is a man will just blend in, so these are the opportunity will not be there and the observed will be very, very significant affected by the observer, that makes a difference and we may say everything you know the world is equal.

But then the difference is really make this thing really make a difference to how things are perceived by the observed also, because he observed is not oblivious to what is going on around him or her. Interpretations will vary, so in a completely male dominated profession, a female observers interpretations of a male dominated situation will be very different, the interpretation of the same situation, the rendering of the observation of a female dominated.

Situation by a female observer will be very different from the rendering, from the description of a male, who is observing a female dominated situation, so it varies you know. The way men and women see the world is very different and so its, we describe what we see and what we observe and those descriptions change because of all these factors.

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Principles of social interaction ... (Contd.)

(Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000)

■ Negotiating a situational identity

- “Interaction is always a tentative process that involves continuous testing by all participants of the conception they have of the roles of others.”
- The researcher goes in with a pre-existing notion & tests it time & again within his/ her role at the site.
- Problem: It becomes difficult to balance the roles of a participant observer & a member in ethnographic research.

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Then negotiating a situation identity, “interaction is always a tentative process that involves continuous testing by all participants of the conception they have of the role of others.” After all when we talk, we are trying to constantly how the other person is receiving what we are saying, now I am back to communication, what I say depends on my interpretation, of what the other person is perceiving, of what I have said, so it’s on negotiation of identity, it’s all negotiation of what we are putting out there.

And interaction is always tend to take the researcher goes in with a pre-existing notion and tests time and again with his or her role at the site. I go and am saying, I’m going to be a non participant observer, I will note this, this, this is real life fortunately or unfortunately does not follow a pattern. And the minute you tell somebody, okay I know what you are going to do next, the reaction okay, I will tell you, so you know it becomes very different and then we adapt as observers to the situation.

So we going with pre-existing notions we can’t because we are human, we have our own understanding of what we will see, what we find and then these pre existing notions are defined as a result of the feedback we get from the environment and then the next, you know the next unit of observation changes, because of the feedback one has got, from the previous unit. So things are tested.

Problem is it becomes difficult to balance the roles of a participant observer and a member in ethnographic research. Okay.

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Principles of social interaction ... (Contd.)

(Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000)

■ Criteria for validation:

- “Participant validate the cues generated by others in the setting by internal and/ or external criteria.” (Internal & external criteria refer to the intra & inter-group norms respectively), i.e. they ask whether what they are doing is in conformity with the rules within the group & universally as well.
- In order for the research to be complete, a researcher needs to validate & capture every aspect of the situation & phenomenon exactly as it means to people within & outside the situation & then convey the meaning exactly in the same format in the report. (Wolf, 1992, in Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000)

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Criteria for validation: “Participant validate the cues generated by others in the setting by internal or external criteria.” Internal and external criteria refer to the intra and inter group norms respectively, i.e. they ask whether what they are doing is in conformity with the rules within the group and universally as well.

And then participants validate this things, you know we find out from the feedback we get from our environment, whether what we are interpreting really fits in or not. In order for the research to be complete, a researcher needs to validate and capture every aspect of the situation and phenomenon exactly as it means to people within and outside the situation and then convey the meaning exactly in the same format in the report.

And that is the criterion, another criterion for validation, so we need to check and then we need to present it in a format that will be acceptable.

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Principles of social interaction ... (Contd.)

(Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000)

■ Contextualization of meaning in research:

- "People come into interactions by assuming situational identities that enhance their own self conception or serve their own needs, which may be context specific rather than socially or culturally normative."
- Members of a community react to *the* particular ethnographer & not to 'an outsider' in the generic sense.
- Hence reports are shaped by the influence the presence & participation of the ethnographer on the situation or phenomenon.
- Denzin (1997, in Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000): "The ethnographer must become aware of his/ her own class, race, gender, & ethnicity, etc. Not to minimize or 'hold them constant' as classic observers taught to do so but to integrate them creatively into both the process of observation & the production of a written presentation of the fruits of that observation."

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Contextualization of meaning in research, members of a community react to the particular ethnographer and not to an outsider in the generic sense and so the presence, the personal characteristics of the observer have an impact, on the way the situation responds, on the way the situation shapes up. So reports are shaped by the influence the presence and participation of the ethnographer on the situation or phenomenon.

The ethnographer must become aware of his or her own class, race, gender and ethnicity, etc, because these things will affect the observed.

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Ethics in observation for research

(McCormick, 1973, McCormick & Ramsey, 1978, in Angrosino & Mays de Perez, 2000)

- "The means will not cause more harm than necessary to achieve the value."
- "No less harmful way exists at present to protect the value."
- "The means to achieve the value will not undermine it."

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Ethics in observation for research, the primary thing that we must be concerned about is that "the means will not cause more harm than necessary to achieve the value," whatever we do will not affect, the will not affect the situation, more than it has to. It shouldn't be "no less

harmful we exist at present to protect the value” and “the means to achieve the value will not undermine it.” I think that is all we have time for in this lecture, we will continue with this in the next class, thank you very much for listening.