

Chapter 6: Observing Behavior



Psychology 2301

Introduction to Research Methods

University of Houston



Nonexperimental Research: Observing Behavior

Observational Methods



- Qualitative approaches
 - Verbal summaries
- Quantitative approaches
 - Statistical analysis
 - Preferred method (publication)

Observational Methods



Research Question:

Naturalistic Observation

- Qualitative
- Starting point when little is known
- Used when you want to “describe and understand how people in a social or cultural setting live, work, and experience the setting.”
- The goal is to provide a complete and accurate picture rather than to test a priori hypotheses.

Naturalistic Observation: Research Issues

- Participant vs. Nonparticipant
 - A nonparticipant remains “outside” the group/situation.
 - A participant assumes an insider role
 - Issues
 - Depth vs. objectivity

Naturalistic Observation: Research Issues

- Concealed vs. Nonconcealed
 - The researcher will not reveal their research purpose in concealed observation
 - In nonconcealed research the “participants” are aware of the research purposes
 - Issues:
 - Reactivity
 - Ethics

Naturalistic Observation: Research Issues

- The researcher must perform a cost-benefit analysis and determine whether or not to conceal their presence (participant) and/or purpose (concealment).
 - Note: this is a continuum, not discrete categories.
- Researchers must always be aware of their role (and their objectivity).

Limitations of Naturalistic Observation

- It is not useful for studying well defined hypotheses under precisely specified conditions
- Very time consuming
- Difficult to analyze the data

**Don't bite off more than you can chew

Systematic Observation

- Careful observation of one or more specific behaviors in a particular setting
- Quantitative
- Prior hypotheses
- Coding system developed to interpret behavior
 - Make as simple as possible (fewer categories) and ensure independence between categories

Systematic Observation: Coding Issues



- Reactivity
- Reliability
 - Use multiple coders to improve reliability (interrater reliability)
- Sampling
 - Longer time period

Case Study

- A descriptive account of the behavior, past history, and other relevant factors, concerning a specific individual (does not have to be a person)
- Researched because it is an anomaly
- Can be very difficult to conduct
- Generalizability

Archival Research



- The use of existing sources of information for research
- Secondary data (as opposed to primary)

Archival Research: Different Types



- **Statistical Records**
 - United States Census Bureau
- **Survey Archives**
 - National Science Foundation
- **Written/Mass communication records**
 - Diaries, letters, etc.

Archival Research: Analysis



- Content Analysis
 - Like systematic observation, requires a coding scheme

Questions?

The word "Questions?" is written in a large, bold, yellow, rounded font. The letter 'i' is replaced by a yellow smiley face with two small circles for eyes and a curved line for a mouth. The text is set against a dark background with a horizontal glow that transitions from blue on the left to purple and then yellow on the right, resembling a comet or a light trail.