Phenomenology and Grounded Theory

Qualitative Methods Showcase
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“A useful framework for anthropology should distinguish person and experience-centered methods, not a qualitative/quantitative binary” (Weisner 2012:4)
Phenomenology

• Lived Experience
  – How we immediately engage with a given phenomenon or aspect of human life
  – Examples: giving birth, being anxious, managing diabetes, having insomnia
  – Assumption: we can only understand the world through our conscious awareness and experience of it
  – Experiences make up the lifeworld or “being in the world”
Human Science

• Phenomenology: the study of phenomena and their essences
• Hermeneutics: the interpretation of experience and its meaning
• Human science studies persons that have consciousness and act purposefully in the world to create objects of meaning (Van Manan 2009:3-4).
## Human Science as Science

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Philosophical Roots

Edmund Husserl
**Lifeworld**

Martin Heidegger
**Caring, Thoughtfulness**

Maurice Merleau-Ponty
**Embodiment**
Investigating Lived Experience

Sources of Material:

• Personal Experience
• Tracing Language
• Idiomatic Phrases
• Experiential Descriptions of Others
• Phenomenological Literature
Critical Analysis

• List every relevant expression or horizon; all have equal value: **horizontalization**
• List all non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements: **invariant meanings or meaning units**
• Cluster meaning units into **themes**
• Use clustered themes to create **textual descriptions**
• Reflect on textual descriptions to construct **description of its essence**
• Integrate **constructed descriptions** across cases and researchers
Evaluating Phenomenological Research

• Phenomenological descriptions and interpretations should be:
  – Full and complete in detail
  – Offer plausible insights, looking beyond pre-conceived ideas
  – Generate a “phenomenological nod” of recognition or resonance
History of Grounded Theory

Helen Nahm
Dean, UCSF
School of Nursing 1958-1969

Anselm Strauss

Bernard (Barney) Glaser

Grounded Theory
American Pragmatism

- Experience is a rich process of interpretation
- Empirical – constant testing of our concepts and propositions (theory)
- Best way to test theory is through scientific experimentation
- Value of statements is their practical utility (Hookway 2010)
Symbolic Interactionism

- Human action is based on meanings we give to actions and things
- Meaning is formed through social interaction
- Meaning is expressed in symbols (gestures, language, images)
- We constantly interpret the world and act accordingly
- Goffman applies this to his theory of stigma (1963)
Grounded Theory: Assumptions and Principles

• From Pragmatism:
  – Highly empirical, “grounded” in the data that is analyzed
  – Test all concepts and propositions against new data: iterative
  – Goal is to develop theory

• From Symbolic Interactionism:
  – Symbolic forms must be analyzed for their meaning
  – Meanings are socially created and shared
Constant Comparison

• Coding
  – *A priori* and *In vivo*
  – Repeated comparison of segments of data within and across cases

• “Tricks of the trade” (Becker 1998)
  – asking questions
  – Looking for negative or disconfirming cases
  – Flip/flopping concepts
  – Metaphors and similes
  – Waving the red flag
Memos

• Types:
  – Defining codes and open data exploration
  – Identifying and developing concepts
  – Asking questions about the data
  – Working out relationships among concepts
  – Refining and adjusting data collection or operations of analysis
  – Integrating concepts or summarizing
“Early Diagram of the Pain Experience” from Corbin and Strauss (2008:131).
Abduction and Theoretical Sampling

Specific Observations

Analysis and Inductions

Hypotheses (Deduction)

Specific Observations (theoretical sampling)

Revise Hypotheses (Deductions)

Specific Observations (theoretical sampling)

Inductions

Middle level theory or model
Evaluating Grounded Theory

• Generalizability must be established every time it is applied
• Time and labor intensive
• Consideration of power, history, and social institutions is not inherent
• Strength is empiricism, constant testing
• Model and theory building of complex phenomena
• Can be applied to quantitative and qualitative data
References


