

Assignment #2
Qualitative Research Report (QRR)
WRIT 1133
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Introduction

Qualitative research methods look to describe and analyze some element of culture, history, or other human phenomena through fieldwork so as to better understand that which was observed. The foundation of qualitative research is that the data the researcher collects is not “fit” into a pre-determined interpretation. Instead, the findings of qualitative research are supported by extensive description of a phenomenon that lead to patterns that can be examined within this data. There are a lot of variations of qualitative research that we will discuss in class, but this assignment will ask you to pick one predominately to look at some phenomenon. However, the most important part of any research endeavor is triangulation. Triangulation is looking at a phenomenon from different perspectives (e.g. yours, another’s) to get a better view of it. Thus, even though you will be picking one method predominately, you will need to triangulate this data with other approaches.

Rationale

Originating in the social sciences and anthropology, qualitative research methods are utilized by other disciplines and majors more often. The process of observation and thick description will help you not only in your major, but also in understanding different cultures and experiences than your own.

The Question(s) (pick one):

1. Ethnography – Using primarily inconspicuous observation, you will take field-notes and/or write up “cooked notes” after extended observation of a culture, environment or phenomenon that you have only limited experience with. After doing such an observation, you will code your notes so as to be able to look for patterns. You will then describe in detail what you observed and what meaning it may have. Besin’s “Exploitation or Fun?” or Ziffer’s “Customer Service” are a good model for this approach.
2. Participant Observer – Much like an ethnography, participant observer research relies on making close observations and recording these observations with notes that you will later analyze. The difference with participant observer research is that you are a participant in the activity. A key caveat is that you are a willing participant in the activity for the primary purpose of doing research—in other words, you cannot observe a fraternity to which you belong or a sports team you are on because your investment in the activity is greater than your investment in the research, and thus, your findings will not be significant to your audience. Ehrenreich’s “Serving in Florida” excerpt from *Nickel and Dimed* and Tibbel’s “Doing Gender as Resistance” are two models of participant observer research.
3. Autoethnography – this type of ethnography is the most difficult to research and write, and it is the most contested as a research method. However, it can be an enriching type

of qualitative research if given time and attention enough. In an autoethnography, you will “observe” one element of a personal activity, culture, or history. You will take careful notes of the activity as well as collect supporting qualitative research. For example, you might want to do an autoethnography of your writing process throughout the term. You would log how much, when, and how you write while working on another writing project. You might collect some old writing you did or maybe observe another student writing as a comparison to your writing process.

Assignment

1. Pick a topic that interests you. Don't worry about the different types of questions I just posed yet—begin by selecting a topic that you want to find more about. You might consider the cultures or “humans” you come into contact with everyday, either on campus, at the coffee shop or Jamba Juice, or at a workplace.
2. Determine if you have a hunch about this particular topic culture or phenomenon. Qualitative research does NOT have hypotheses. The whole point of qualitative research is to collect data that will be later analyzed. If you have a hypothesis, then you will be tempted to ONLY look at that which you think you are going to find. In qualitative research, you might have a hunch based on repeated observation of a phenomenon or based on background research. This hunch you will begin to think about on paper as what will later become part of your introduction. But it should never limit what you are observing.
3. Research your hunch using the library or any other text-based sources. For example, if researching coffee shop culture, you might read more closely Besen's article. If doing an autoethnography on your writing process, you might look for some writing that you did when you were much younger. You might research writing process research in the library. You will take this interpretive data and determine further what your hunch will be about the topic you will be researching.
4. Determine your research methods. You will then need to create a research plan and turn it in on **April 15**.
5. You will draft a 1-2 page introduction to your study. This introduction will integrate whatever interpretive research and your hunches about the phenomenon you will be observing. You will end the introduction with a description in 1-2 paragraphs about how you will conduct your research. You will turn a draft in **April 27**.
6. Conduct your observations. You will need to conduct 5 to 10 hours of observation of your topic. You can do this observation over as many days as you would like, and it will depend on exactly what you are researching. If you are able, you will take fieldnotes (description of what you are seeing while observing in as much detail as possible—do not interpret. These are just notes of what occurred in raw form). If the situation makes it impossible to take good fieldnotes, then immediately after you observe the activity, you will need to write “cooked notes” (notes listing as much as you can remember during the activity that might also have your evaluation or interpretation of the descriptions). Depending on your research, you may find different note taking strategies useful. You might draw pictures of where certain things are in a room, or keep logs of how long something takes or when something regularly occurs.

7. Analyze your observations. After conducting your observations, you will need to read over your notes looking for patterns. Sometimes coding, or applying a designation to an activity, might make finding something easier later on. If you find patterns, you need to write up succinctly using 50% of the description and 50% of your interpretation of the description in a paragraph or two. If you find multiple patterns of multiple instances of the same pattern, follow with summarizing/detailing what you saw (50%) and analyzing the pattern (50%).
8. Triangulate your findings. Now that you have discovered this hitherto unknown phenomenon, you will need to further support your observations with one or two additional sources. One way is another trip to the library for more text-based research. Or, you might consider observing another similar location and doing another observation to see if similar patterns occur. You could also decide to interview a participant in the activity trying to get further information about the phenomenon. The results here are the same—50/50 description/analysis of what occurred.
9. Write a separate document that does two things. First, it gives your reader a thesis (yes, in qualitative research, you are coming to the thesis at the end, after the observation of the activity). In other words, you are going to tell the reader the major thing you found after doing this research. The second part of this conclusion will describe the limitations of your study and what further research might be necessary of this topic based on your findings.
10. The most difficult step is to put this all together. Thus, the Introduction, Study, and Conclusion need to be assembled into one, coherent document. You will turn this final document in with your fieldnotes/cooked notes (they don't have to be typed), and a References page (APA). **May 18** is the deadline for the final project.

Requirements (these apply to ALL approaches. Thus, even if you do autoethnography, you will need to meet these requirements)

- You need to use at least one journal article from a peer reviewed source.
- You need at least 5 hours of observation and corresponding notes.
- You will need at least one interview or an additional 5 hours of observation and corresponding notes.
- This paper is to be 8 pages of text. The required References page does not count towards that page requirement.
- It should be in APA format. Remember that APA style has a different expectation as to use of sources, relying on paraphrases and command of the subject matter more than quotations. Refer to *QA Compact* ch.34.
- It should be organized into three sections: Introduction, Study and Conclusion

Timeline/Due dates

- April 15 Research Plan Due via Dropbox
- April 27 Introduction Due via Dropbox
- May 18 Final Draft w/fieldnotes via Dropbox