Qualitative social research methods
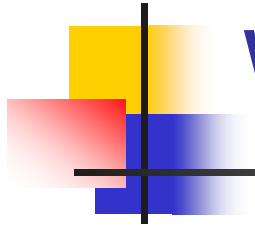
Case Studies in Qualitative Research.

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Week 6

Week 6 overview

- Sampling in qualitative projects
- Case study: moneylenders and their customers
- Case study: researching Subcultures
- Feedback proposals/ethical approval forms

Sampling

- Quantitative sampling aims at representativeness

- Qualitative sampling aims at information-rich cases:
  - Need range and diversity (set quotas)
  - Link to power of explanation and research aims
 - Be realistic and practical

Implications of qualitative sampling

- You will not produce statistics
- You cannot make simple generalisations with any degree of confidence
- You can explore relationships
- You can build/explore (conceptual) models
- You can identify the nature, type and range of experiences people have

Moneylenders and their customers (Rowlingson, K. 1994)
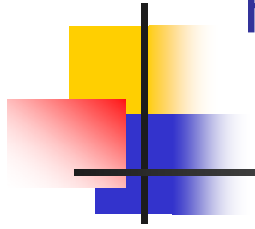
- ## A controversial industry with a long history

- ## Licensed sector
  - ### Doorstep collection, invisible industry
  - ### Competing views

- ## Overall aim of research:
  - ### To increase our knowledge of the licensed sector and assess the competing views of the industry

Moneylenders – research objectives

- What role does doorstep collection play?
- Are interest rates unnecessarily high?
- How much choice do customers have?
- How 'vulnerable' are customers?
- Do moneylenders lend irresponsibly?
- Do moneylenders charge default penalties?

Moneylenders - research methods

- Case studies of 6 companies
  - 2 small, 2 medium, 2 large
  - 2 North, 2 Midlands, 2 South
- Interviews with managers and collectors (8 collectors in total)
- Interviews with customers (31 in total)
  - Range of demographic and customer types
- Non-participant observation

Moneylenders - methodological issues

- Gatekeeping and bias in sampling
- Reactive effects
- Honesty in interviews/response bias
- Data collection
- Data analysis
- Report writing
- Independent checks

Moneylenders
- key findings

- 1200 companies, 27,000 collectors, 3 million customers
- Doorstep collection is convenient but linked to subtle pressures to repay and borrow
- Interest is high but so are costs
- Amount of choice varies
- Customers are diverse but generally poor

Key Findings 2

- visit approximately 3 million customers every week to lend and collect repayments.
- The majority of collectors are women.
- Customers have limited access to other, cheaper forms of credit. But most are happy with the service they receive.
- The very poorest groups in society have limited access to even to legal money lending. These may be the people who turn instead to the loansharks'.

Moneylenders - key findings continued

- Moneylenders do not seem to lend irresponsibly
- Few default charges but roll-over loans are problematic
- Can't generalise with confidence – need quantitative research
- Research had massive media coverage and is still having an impact

Case study: researching Subcultures 1

- Dick Hebdige 1979 *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*
- blend of Althusser, Gramsci and semiotics
- world of "subcultures" more visible in Britain than anywhere else
- teds, skinheads, punks, Bowie-ites, hippies, dreads

Researching subcultures 2

- Hebdige uses two Gramscian terms to analyse subcultures: conjuncture and specificity.
- Subcultures form in communal and symbolic engagements with the larger system of culture
- organized around (but not wholly determined by, age and class)
- expressed in the creation of styles
- styles are produced within specific historical and cultural 'conjunctures'
- not to be read as simply resistance of hegemony or as resolutions to social tensions - as earlier theorists had supposed.
- subcultures mix or hybridize styles out of images and material culture available to them.
- They attempt to construct identities which will confer on them "relative autonomy" within a social order fractured by class, generational differences, work etc.

Researching subcultures 3

- Hebdige (1988) later revises his method
- admits that he has underestimated the power of commercial culture to appropriate and produce, counter-hegemonic styles
- Eg. Punk a mixture of an avant-garde cultural strategy, marketing savvy and working-class transgression that emerged out of a section of British youth's restricted access to consumer markets.
- line between subculture as resistance and commercial culture very hard to draw.
- Commercial culture simulateneously a provider of pleasures and an instrument of hegemony.

Researching Subcultures 4

- How can we apply Hebdige's methods to subcultures in the new millenium?
- Goths, Grebos, Chavs, Skaters hip-hop culture?
- What about those groups where fanship, niche marketing, technology and subcultures fuse?
- Football fans, online communities, trekkies, break dancers
- do fans of high culture now make up a subculture-opera, theatre, philosophy circles?
- How can we conceptualise group phenomena such as swinging, Anne Summers parties etc
- Individuals also belong to more than one subcultural group simultaneously.

Purpose of Qualitative study:
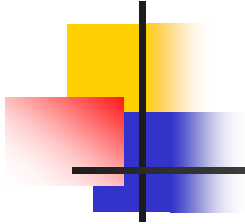
There are 5 purposes for research

- **Identification** – when little is known about area/phenomena
- **Description** – describing dimensions, variations, meaning, importance of the phenomena
- **Exploration** – new topic/phenomena being investigated
- **Explanation** – look for how/why phenomena exists
- The main purpose of qualitative research is to describe, understand, connect or relate **NOT** predict or manipulate.

Three Qualitative Research Designs

1. Ethnography
2. Phenomenology
3. Grounded Theory
- Selection of method depends on what you are interested in studying.
- Each method provides a framework that guides the various research activities, purpose of the study and research questions.

Important to remember:

The goal is to deal with the greatest complexity and variety; to acquire the richest possible data
- Time decisions evolve over the study

Ethnography
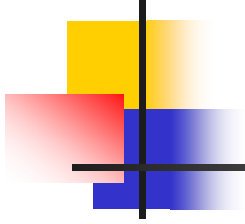
- Focus is on descriptions of cultural groups or subgroups.
- Goal is to understand the "natives'" view of their world or *emic* (insiders') view.
- Requires that the researcher enter the world of the study participants to watch what happens, listen to what is said, ask questions, and collect data.
- Used in to study cultural variations in group meanings and mores
- Studying groups as subcultures within larger social contexts.
- Ask about life experiences or particular patterns of behaviour within a social context
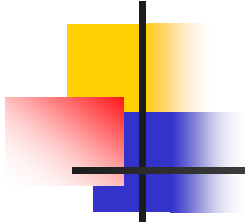
Phenomenology

- A process of learning and constructing the meaning of human experience through intensive dialogue with persons who are living the experience.

- Goal is to understand '*the lived experience*' of the participant.

- Asks "What is the lived experience" of "What is the meaning..."

- Researcher's perspective is *bracketed*

Grounded Theory

- Aim is to discover underlying social forces that shape human behaviour.
- Interested in the social processes and structures from the perspective of human interactions.
- Goal is to generate an *inductively* derived theory about basic social processes.
- Often are the "How do..." questions.
- Core feature is that data collection, analysis and sampling occur simultaneously until data saturation is achieved.
- Termed the *Constant Comparative Method.*

Multi-Method Research (Integrated Design)
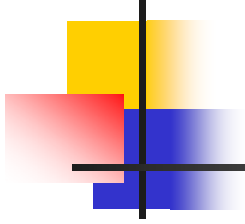
- Combining Quantitative and Qualitative Methods in a single study.
- Have participants fill out a questionnaire and also interview them on specific topics
- May conduct interviews but "quantify" the results
- This method is slightly controversial among purists