Introduction to Interpretive Description Methodology

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Qualitative Methods Master Class Webinar Series
## Foundations of Qualitative Methods for the Study of Applied Problems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grounded Theory</th>
<th>Sociology</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenology</td>
<td>Philosophy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnography</td>
<td>Anthropology</td>
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Epistemological Positioning (aka Disciplinary Hardwiring)
Wholes and Parts in Interaction
Ideas and Interpretations
Commonalities and Differences
The Nature of Knowledge for Practice

- Processual
- Evolving
- Flexible
- Infinitely Adaptive
The Evidence Imperative
The Nature of Clinical Knowledge

- Patterns and Processes that Inform Clinical Reasoning
- Theoretical Knowledge
- Empirical Knowledge
- Pattern Recognition
- Infinite Variation of Pattern
- Knowing the Patient
Confronting Resistance to Qualitative Approaches

- Health science community
- Social scientist colleagues
- Grant reviewers/journal editors
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phenomenology</th>
<th>Nursing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bracketing Preconceptions</td>
<td>Building on Disciplinary Knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Essential Nature of Lived Phenomena</td>
<td>Human &amp; Contextual Variation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pure Description</td>
<td>Interpretation &amp; Explanation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grounded Theory</td>
<td>Nursing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Symbolic Interaction</td>
<td>Assumptions not Predicated on Interactional Material</td>
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<tr>
<td>Basic Social Processes</td>
<td>No Presumption of Underlying Mechanisms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Account as Access to Fundamental Explanation for Social Behavior</td>
<td>Individual Account as Window into Possibilities in Shared Aspects</td>
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<td>Ethnography</td>
<td>Nursing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural Immersion</td>
<td>Seeing Familiar Culture in New Ways</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interconnectedness of Whole Cultures</td>
<td>No Preconception of Shared Cultural Understandings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge Subjective Understandings with Behavioral Observation</td>
<td>Invite Interpretation &amp; Explanation</td>
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Impact of Wider Context

- Funding body requirements (e.g. predetermined sample and design; assumptions of relevance)
- Social science norms (e.g. theoretical frameworks; saturation)
- Journal manuscript length (depth & richness)
Resultant Body of Problematic Qualitative Work

- Confusion over role of theory
- Essentializing claims
- Abdication of generalization
- Overuse of metaphoric representations
Methodological Orthodoxy in Qualitative Nursing Research: Analysis of the Issues

Sally E. Thorne

In this analysis, the applicability of orthodox qualitative research traditions to the questions of nursing science is considered from a critical perspective. The theoretical traditions of ethnography, phenomenology, and grounded theory are examined in light of their relationship to the larger projects of anthropology, philosophy, and sociology. From that perspective, the questions inherent to nursing science are distinguished, revealing major departures from the process, product, and even purpose of the original inquiries. This analysis provides a platform on which the possibilities for a uniquely nursing approach to qualitative inquiry can be envisioned. In this spirit, ideas about what that methodological perspective might entail are proposed.

The divergent theoretical underpinnings of qualitative (naturalistic) and quantitative (positivistic) research paradigms demand incompatible approaches to the conduct of all phases of research. The history and tradition within qualitative nursing research originates in the methodologies of several different disciplinary traditions. Just as quantitative scientific approaches proved insufficient for answering all of nursing’s theoretical and practical questions, the qualitative approaches derived from other disciplines have not always met the unique demands of nurse researchers. We examine some of the reasons that nurse researchers have felt compelled to depart from traditional methods, despite a concurrent concern for retaining methodological integrity in their work. We take the position that it may be an appropriate time in our history to consider noncategorial qualita...
Interpretive Description

- Derived from NURSING epistemology
- Borrows the best of technique from conventional (social science method) without taking along the theoretical baggage
- Uses theory as a tool, not as the ultimate purpose
• Draws on applied disciplinary epistemology rather than borrowed theory
Creativity in the use of data sources and inquiry approaches
• Knowledge translation built into the initial design
Orientation toward a body of more relevant and useable qualitatively derived knowledge

- Patient Values & Expectations
- Optimal Directions
- Formal Evidence
- Clinical Wisdom
Venturing Beyond Description and Theorizing
Forestructure
Languaging Methodological Orientation

- Being an Interpretive Descriptionist
- Doing Interpretive Description

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✓ Using an Interpretive Description approach to...
✓ Drawing on Interpretive Description methodology informed by....
✓ Adapting a ... approach through the use of Interpretive Description methodology
Framing Research Questions

- What is the essential structure of....?
- What is the lived experience of....?
- What are the basic social processes of....?
- How do .... describe/explain/understand/make sense of their experiences with....?
- What can be learned from....?
What Theory Privileges

and

What it Obscures
Options for Data Sources

- Individual subjective perspective/experience

- Beyond Interviews:
  - Non-empirical literature
  - Documentary sources
  - Participant observation
  - Expert opinion
Deciding on Sample Size?
The Work of Data Analysis

- Pieces to patterns
  - The tradition of coding
  - Alternatives to coding
- From patterns to relationships
  - Knowing your data
  - Applying technique
  - Documenting analytic thinking
Moving Beyond Recipes

- Coding
- Themes, patterns, categories
- Taxonomies vs findings
What do we find that we expected to find and what was unexpected

What common ideas come up in all or most cases?

What similarities and differences can we see between cases?

What story is emerging from these accounts that needs telling?
Writing up Findings

- Itemized collection of “things” (themes, categories, subcategories)
  vs
- Coherent narrative

Formulating Findings for the Application Context
The Explicit Contribution of Applied Qualitative Science

- That which science misses/misunderstands
- That which defies quantification
- That which behaves in ways that cannot be regularized
- That which changes outside the context of its natural complexity
Corrective to “Big Science”
Illuminator
Variance Interpreter
Challenger
Humanizer
Knowledge Translation Integration

Understanding intended audience from the outset
And the dialectic between inquiry and action continues...
Key Resources


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IIQM Archived MasterClass Webinars
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