Presentation outline

- What
  - definition
- Why
  - purpose
- When
  - use
- How
  - role of researcher
  - method
- Where
  - location
- Who
  - participants
- Activities
  - observation v. looking
  - observation methods
The essence of observation is “… to render our daily lives socially intelligible and meaningful by keenly observing others as well as reflecting on our own personal experience.” (Singleton)
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<td>Introduction</td>
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- **Scientific purpose**
- **Intentional**
  - participant
  - nonparticipant
- **Recording and analyzing**
- **Qualitative and quantitative**
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<tr>
<td>Introduction to observations</td>
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- **In native environment of the observed**
  - first hand
  - second hand
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Introduction to observations

- **Places the observer in the participants’ frame of reference**
  - other terminology for observation techniques:
    - field research
    - case study
    - ethnography
• 70% of human energy is dedicated to understanding visual stimuli
  • Significant purpose of observation is to make sense of sensory input
  • Take in sensory data then analyze
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**Purpose**

- The observer seeks to truly understand the subject
  - what they think
  - how they act
  - what they understand
  - see the world as the subject sees it
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- **The observer seeks to see the unseeable and get beyond:**
  - misinformation
  - generalizations
  - deceptions
- **Society in general**
- **Subject’s own perceptions**
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- The observer seeks to observe without filters
  - begins broad and then narrows
  - stays open to new possibilities
- Observation techniques complements other research techniques and offer leads for additional research
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<tr>
<td>Use</td>
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<td>• When dynamic situations are to be analyzed</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• When it is important to preserve the natural setting</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• When it is crucial to understand the subjects’ interpretation of reality</td>
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Use

- When the science of social life must be analyzed
- When the observer intends to extract meaningful interpretation of the social world
- When direct observation is necessary
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**Video Activity #1**
- observation
- looking/ watching
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<td>Participants</td>
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**Subject**
- identify group/ individual
  - demographics targeted
  - location

**Observer**
- identify researcher bias
- assess knowledge needed to complete observations

**Assistants**
- possibility of multiple observers
  - identify variations in observation abilities
Method

To begin:

- Pose broad substantive and theoretical questions (hypotheses)
- Create a methodological approach based on observation in natural settings
- Start broad, and narrow as you go

- Participant
- Nonparticipant

(Singleton)
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Role of Researcher</th>
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**Participant**
- Researcher as active participant
- Extended period of time
- May live or work in the area
- Becomes an accepted member of group or community

*ex) often used by anthropologists and sociologists to study groups or communities*
Role of Researcher

**Nonparticipant**

- observes without interacting
- often subjects do not know they are being observed
- structured & unstructured observation
Role of Researcher

**Nonparticipant**

**Structured Observation**

- uses preset plans for selection, recording, and encoding of data
  - standardization allows for multiple observers
  - gather a greater amount of data quickly
  - utilizes checklists, charts, forms
- good for gathering quantitative data
- greater control of sampling and measurement area
- allows for stronger generalizations
Role of Researcher

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<td><strong>Unstructured Observation</strong></td>
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<td>• good for early stages of research</td>
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<td>• consists of note taking, no tables or checklists</td>
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<td>• Extremely time consuming</td>
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<td>• requires multiple visits</td>
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<td>• observations tend to narrow slightly as patterns or certain types of behaviors are seen repeatedly</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• researcher becomes familiar with the environment and people after long periods of time</td>
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<td>- able to make distinctions as to demographic</td>
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<td>- identify repeat users, people</td>
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### Role of Researcher

#### Participant & Nonparticipant

**Limitations**

- Researcher bias
- Data skewed by subjects’ knowledge of observer
- Highly dependent on observational and interpretive skills of researcher
- Difficult to replicate research
- Unable to generalize data
Role of Researcher

**Participant**

- **Complete Participant** - researcher concealed
- **Observer as Participant** - observers role is known
- **Participant as observer** - observation role secondary to participant role

**Nonparticipant**

- **Complete observer** - researcher does not participate
**Methods to be used in conjunction with observation**

- Interviews
- Questionnaires
- Document collection and analysis
- Audio-visual collection and analysis
Sampling

- nonrandom selection of spaces or locations
  - **probability sampling**
    researcher has prior knowledge of field, area on which to draw from (statistical generalization)
  - **maximizing variation**
    “serial selection of sample units” every locale analyzed one at a time, more added to fill gaps, answer questions
  - **dimensional spaces**
    selecting spaces dependent on time, day of the week
    good for sampling random occurrences (accidents)
  - **theoretical sampling**
    gathering specific information directly related to a hypothesis or theory
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**Determining what to observe**

- “Primary sources of data are the words and actions of the people you are observing, listening to, and entering into conversation with.”
  (Singleton)

- **concrete facts**
  specific details, avoid analysis
  what will be useful is not able to be determined immediately

- **detailed description of events**
  describe patterns, but not every occurrence
  add to notes as changes occur

- **keep facts and interpretations separate**
  what you actually see is different from what you think or how you feel
**Recording Procedures**

- Developed plan for data recording
- Observational protocol
  - **descriptive notes**
    visuals of participants, description of setting, accounts of events
  - **reflective notes**
    researchers personal thoughts, feelings, emotions, hunches, ideas
  - **demographic information**
    time, place, age, gender, and date
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**Recording Approaches**

- Observational notes by participating in research
- Observational notes by observing research
- Conduct an unstructured interview with subjects
  - written notes
  - videotaped
  - audio recording
- Researcher keeps a journal
- Participant keeps a journal
- Videotaping of situation, event
- Collect Sounds
- Examine possessions or ritual objects

(Creswell 189)
**Data Analysis**

- Prior to completion of research:
  - constantly evaluating and reflecting on data collected
  - keeping data open-ended, not drawing conclusions prematurely

- “Systematically looking for patterns in recorded observations and formulating ideas that account for those patterns.”

1. **organizing information**
2. **developing ideas**
3. **drawing and verifying conclusions**

(Singleton 346)
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<th>Method</th>
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<tr>
<td>Validating Data</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Occurs throughout observation process</td>
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<tr>
<td>- patterns</td>
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<td>- multiple observers</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Techniques for checking accuracy of findings (Creswell 196)</td>
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<td>- triangulation</td>
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<td>- member - checking</td>
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<td>- rich, thick descriptions</td>
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<td>- clarify bias</td>
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<td>- present negative or discrepant data</td>
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<td>- prolonged time in the field</td>
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<td>- peer debriefing</td>
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<td>- external auditor</td>
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**Video Activity #2**
- making observations
- structured and unstructured
- purposeful observation
Selecting a research site

- Directly related to research topic
- Easily accessible
- Allows for development of rapport with subjects

(all three rarely realized)
**Selecting a research site**

- Permit clear observation
  - unaltered settings
- Accessible as possible
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**Gaining access**

- **Formal organization**
  - speak to person in charge (gatekeeper)
  - get foot in the door (volunteer, having someone vouch for you, etc.)

- **Public setting** (park, sidewalks, public restroom)
  - no formal access needed
  - may want to notify authorities

- **Semipublic** (restaurant, bar, store)
  - speak with manager/ owner
  - loiterers can be arrested! oops.
Gaining access

- Communities, groups and clubs
  - investigate ways to become part of group
  - conversation
  - placing yourself in high traffic areas
  - locating key informants
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<td>Conclusion</td>
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**Summary**

- Observation has scientific purpose
- Begin broad, then narrow
- Takes place in native environment of the subject
- The observer seeks to truly understand the subject
- good for use in studying dynamic situations
- Two types of observation
  - participant
  - nonparticipant
- Make observations, organize, analyze, make conclusions
Bibliography
