

## PSY 250

### Descriptive Research Chapter 13

## Descriptive Strategy Overview

- Measures a variable or set of variables as they exist naturally
- Not concerned with relationship between variables but with description of individual variables
- Useful as preliminary research

## Observational Studies

- Naturalistic/behavioural observation
  - Natural setting
  - E.g. Education and Clinical Research
- Systematic technique
- Subject reactivity
  - Hidden observers
  - Habituation
- Subjective interpretations by observer
  - List of behaviour categories
  - Well-trained, multiple observers
    - Inter-rater reliability (Cohen's Kappa – 0 to 1.0)

## Ethogram

Code	Definition/Description
E-1	Call is not standing, or locomoting; may be resting on all fours, side, or back, with legs extended or tucked under
Stand Still	The cat is not in locomotion, but holds an upright posture
Walk/Slack	Call in locomoting with chest and abdomen close to the ground, legs fully extended, may be pressed against walls or objects
Walk-Forward	Call in locomoting with legs extended and relaxed body posture
Leap	Call presses its body, or head, against object or surface
Jump	The cat uses its legs and feet to vertically lift off of the ground
Purr	A "rattling" sound which does not require the cat to open its mouth, often accompanied by other nonaudible behaviours
Growl	A deep "growling" sound often accompanied by stress-type behaviours
Roar	A sharp whistle of air
Roar	A specific unarticulated vocalization, unrecognizable in sound, "rumor-rum" or "rur-rum"
Yawn/Whine	A greater intensity growl often with the last vowel sound extended
Push at Door	The cat uses one or both front feet to manipulate the door
E-2a Stare	Call stares head
E-2b Stare	The cat is behind the experimenter's body
E-2c Stare	Call presses its body, or head, against the experimenter
L-L-E	Call uses legs in repetition on the experimenter
Climb on E's leg	Call locomotes onto the experimenter's crossed legs
Rest E	Call closes its mouth and both second experimenter may be seen when call is behaving negatively (as in which or positively (as in "thank you"))
Stretch E	Call uses paw and claws in a sweeping motion
Push E	Call uses paw(s) to manipulate an object or touch an object, without the use of claws



## Content Analysis and Archival Research

- Content Analysis
  - Measure behaviors in movies or books
- Archival Research
  - Study historical documents
- Same techniques:
  - Catalog behaviors
  - Frequency, duration or interval method
  - Inter-rater reliability

## Participant Observation

A type of naturalistic observation in which the researcher participates in the research setting and interacts with the informants

- Can range from complete participation to complete nonparticipation
- Level of deception varies from
  - *Complete deception*: Others are unaware of observer's role as a researcher
  - *Absence of deception*: Others are fully aware of researcher's role

## Naturalistic Observation

- Also called nonparticipant observation
- Observe and record behavior in natural setting without intervening in any way
- Pros
  - High external validity
  - Can measure behaviors not able to manipulate
- Cons
  - Time-consuming
  - Important not to be disruptive

## Types of Participant Observation

### Complete participant

- The researcher participates as a full member of the group or community being studied
- Others are unaware of observer's role
  - Offers unique insight into events of interest
  - Raises ethical issue of deception

## Participant Observation

- Research interacts with and becomes one of the participants

- Rosenhan (1973)
- Drug busts
- Mobs
- Occult activities



Number of patients judged	193
Number of patients confidently judged as pseudo patients by at least one staff member	41
Number of patients suspected by one psychiatrist	23
Number of patients suspected by one psychiatrist AND one other staff member	19

The main experiment illustrated a failure to detect sanity (of 8 actual), and the secondary study demonstrated a failure to detect insanity.

## Participant Observation

- Pros
  - Insight, accessibility
  - High external validity
- Cons
  - Time consuming
  - Dangers
  - Loss of objectivity



## Types of Participant Observation

### Participant as observer

- The researcher participates fully in the research setting
- Others know that s/he is a researcher
  - Deception therefore not an issue

## Disguised vs. Nondisguised Observation

- Should participants know that they are being observed?
- Problem with undisguised observation:
  - Reactivity – participants act differently because they know they are being watched
- Problems with disguised observation:
  - May violate right of informed consent
  - Potential violation of privacy

## Disguised vs. Nondisguised Observation

- Ways to minimize reactivity:
  - Habituation
  - Partial concealment
    - participants know that they are being observed but not the specific aspects of behavior being observed
  - Knowledgeable informants
    - people who know the participants well observe and rate their behavior
  - Unobtrusive/ nonreactive measures
    - indirect measures that can be taken without participants knowing they are being studied

## Contrived Observation

- Also called structured observation
- Sets up situation instead of waiting for behavior to occur naturally
- Often conducted in lab
- Also set up in natural settings
  - E.g. bird feeder
- Piaget

## Strengths and Weaknesses of Observational Research Designs

- Pros:
  - Actual behavior vs. reports of it
  - High external validity
  - Flexibility
- Cons:
  - Ethical concerns
  - Descriptive only

## Survey Research Interviews and Questionnaires

- Can ask questions at any time
- Don't have to observe directly
- Structured Questions
- Examples:
  - Eating Behaviour
  - Political Attitudes
  - Demographic info of customers

## Question Content

- Memory Questions
  - Hemenway – false positives for rare events
  - Poor memory for common events
  - Different strategies to recall events from recent and distant past
    - Last week – minor irritations
    - Last year – major irritations
  - Telescoping – events from distant past are remembered as having occurred more recently than they actually did

## Question Content cont.

- Attitude Questions
  - Biasing effects of words
    - Raskinski (1989) – less support for “welfare” than for “assistance” for the poor
  - Earlier questions can influence responding on later questions – chronically vs. temporarily accessible info.
  - Biasing effects of interviewer
- Demographic Questions

## Question Types: Open-ended

- Greatest flexibility
- but
- Range of answers may be problematic
  - Difficult to analyze
  - Limited by participants' expressiveness
- Describe your typical dating experience
  - What is your favorite flavor of ice-cream?
  - Where do you think a 3 million dollar donation to the university is most needed?

## Question Types: Restricted

- Closed questions
- Select from answers already provided
- Limited number of response alternatives
- Easy to analyze and summarize
  - “How do you typically meet someone to date?”
    - [ ] Introduced by someone
    - [ ] Social event
    - [ ] In a university class or place of work
    - [ ] At a bar
    - [ ] Through sports or other athletic events
  - Can include blank category:
  - [ ] Other describe \_\_\_\_\_

## Question Types: Rating Scale

- Select numerical value on predetermined scale
- Easy to analyze
- Range of alternatives from positive to negative, not at all descriptive to describes perfectly or strongly agree to disagree (Likert scale)
- Equal spacing between response alternatives

## Question Types: Rating Scale

- Anchors = verbal labels that establish the end points of the scale
- Middle often labeled esp. if denotes neutral response
- Labeling other points is optional
- Response set = participants' tendency to answer all questions in same way
  - Use alternative phrasing – positive and negative wording

## Survey Construction

- Demographic questions at end
- Sensitive questions in middle
- Grouping by topic and question type
- Uncluttered format
- Accessible language

## Participant Selection

- Those for whom questions have relevance (volunteer bias)
- Broad cross-section

## Administering Survey

- Mail
- Telephone
- Internet
- Touch-screen Kiosks
- In person

## Cover Letter for Mailed Surveys

- Nonresponse bias
- Topic's importance
- Usefulness of results
- Importance of each individual response
- Contact person for questions or comments
- Signature of recognized, respected researcher
- Include gift
- Advance warning
- Follow-up letter

## Telephone Surveys

- Time-consuming
- Keep questions short and small # of response alternatives
- Practice reading survey aloud
- Interviewer bias
  - Consistent, neutral tone
  - Don't change questions
- Begin by identifying yourself and topic

## In-Person Interviews & Surveys

- Interviews usually reserved for key informants or those who can't read and answer written questions
- Experimenter bias – adopt consistently mildly positive response

## Social Desirability

- Impression management
  - Active deception to keep interviewer from forming negative impression
- Self-deception positivity
  - Overly positive self report, not consciously
- Conform to pre-existing stereotypes
- Acquiescence
  - Tendency to agree with assertion of question no matter what it is
- Satisficing
  - Choose first acceptable response even if it's not the best

## Cautionary Notes

- Results show that XX % REPORT that....  
NOT that.....
  - E.g. 14% of girls under the age of 16 **report** having engaged in sexual activities
- NOT
  - 14% of girls under the age of 16 **have** engaged in sexual activities

## Case Studies

- In depth record of an individual's experience
- No manipulation
- Idiographic approach = intensive study of individuals
- Often used in clinical research
- Demonstrate exception to a rule
- Rare phenomena
  - E.g. woman found alive after being buried under rubble for 60 days in Pakistan earthquake (Naqsha Bibi)
  - H.M.
  - Sybil



## Case Study Strengths and Weaknesses

- More vivid and personal
- Exaggerated sense of credibility
- Lack both internal and external validity
- Selective bias –report most successful or dramatic case