

Qualitative Methods

Overview of Qualitative Methods

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From Gery Ryan, RAND Corp., 2005

What is Qualitative Data Analysis?

What is Qualitative Research?

- Texts
- Focus groups
- Semi-structured interviews
- Grounded theory
- Narratives
- Finding themes in text
- Marking texts for codes
- Pictures
- Nud*ist
- Video tapes
- Content analysis
- Ethnography
- Words
- Open-ended questions
- Participant observation
- Life histories
- Case studies
- etc.

What is Qualitative Data Analysis?

	Data	
Analysis	Qualitative (Texts)	Quantitative (Ordinal/Ratio Scale)
Qualitative	Interpretive text studies. Hermeneutics, Grounded Theory	Search for and presentation of meaning in results of quantitative processing
Quantitative	Turning words into numbers. Classic Content Analysis, Word Counts, Free Lists, Pile Sorts, etc.	Statistical & mathematical analysis of numeric data

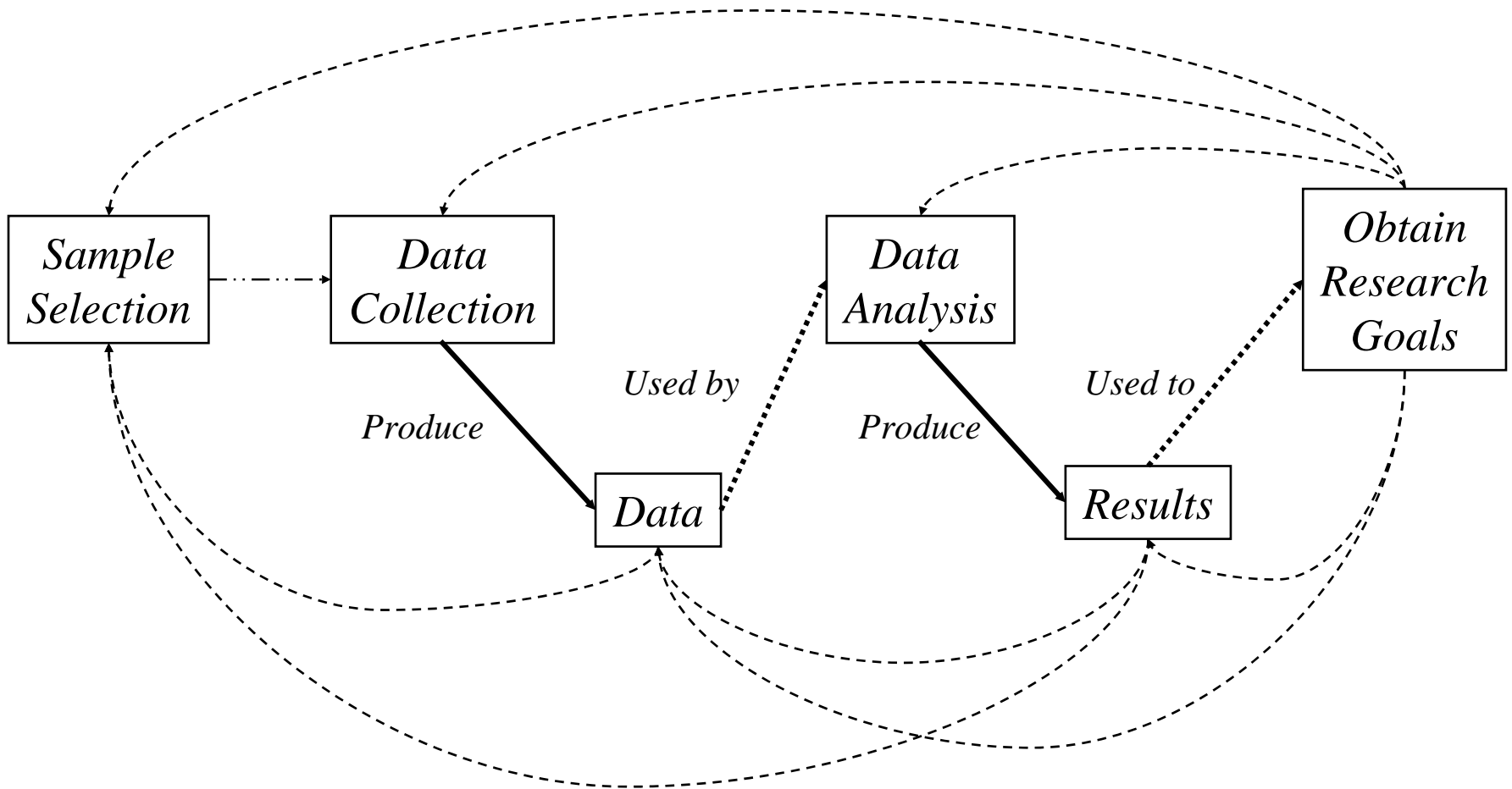
Where Does Qualitative Research Fit, In Terms of Research Goals?

General Aim	Type	Questions
1. <i>Exploration</i>		What kind of things are present here? How might these things be related to each other?
2. <i>Description</i>	Case	What does a case look like?
	Group	What does a set of cases look like? Is a particular kind of thing (A) present or not? How much of that kind of thing (A) is there?
	Cultural	What does the culture look like?
3. <i>Comparison</i>	Case	How is Case X different from Case Y?
	Group	How is Group X's different from Group of Y's?
4. <i>Model Testing</i>	Case	To what degree does a particular case conform to the proposed model?
	Group	To what degree does a group of cases conform to the proposed model?

What are the Advantages of Qualitative Data Analysis?

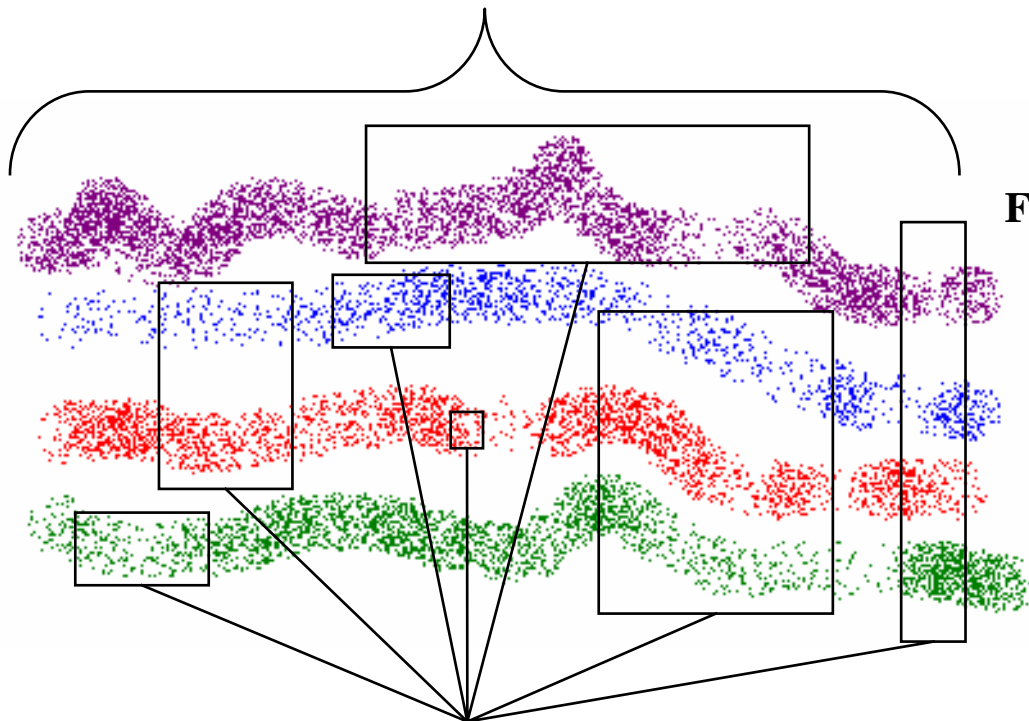
- Brings researcher closer to people's experiences
 - Places experience in larger context
 - Respondents describe their experiences in their own words
 - Gives voice to those whose views are rarely heard
- Method for discovery
 - Identifies new concepts/themes that emerge from data
 - Generates hypotheses by linking new concepts into substantive and formal theories
- Useful for understanding complex, dynamic, and multidimensional phenomena, e.g.,
 - Process and mechanisms of change
 - Identifying and clarifying perceptions of different stakeholder groups
 - Tracking unique and unexpected events
- Useful for understanding the results of more quantitative analysis (I.e., validity-check?)

Task Sequencing in Qualitative Research



What is a Datum?

Phenomenon of Interest



Chunks of Data

Flows of Experience:

Behavioral (What did you do?)

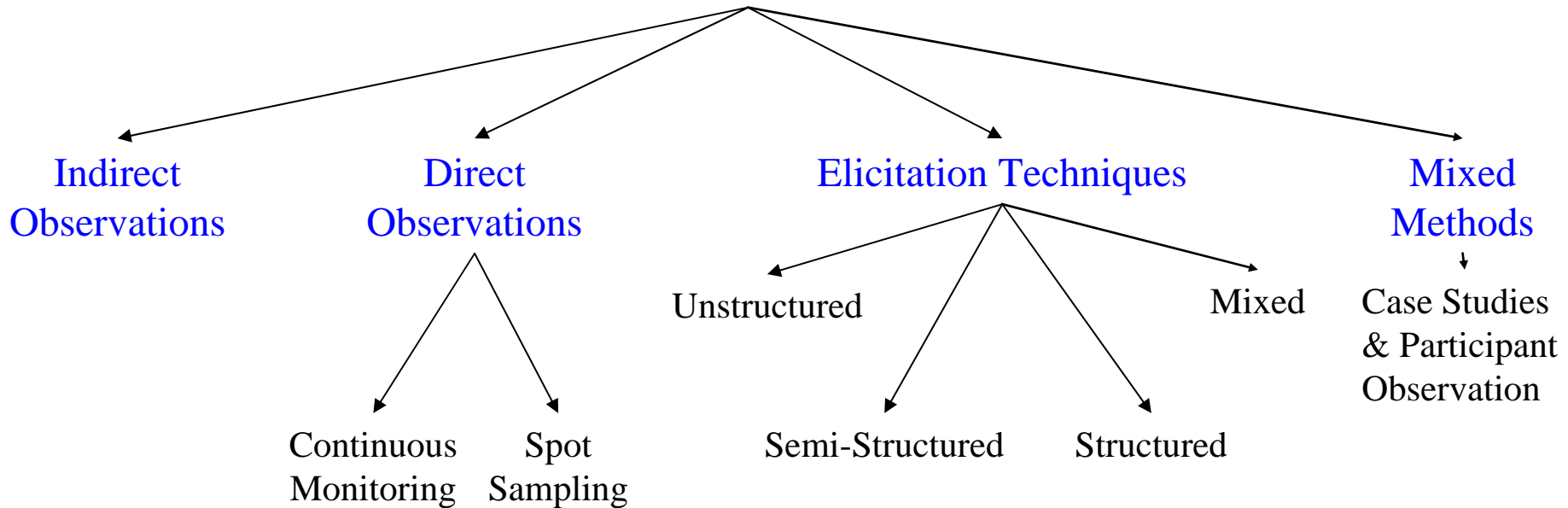
Emotional (How did you feel?)

Cognitive (What did you think?)

Environmental (What else was happening?)

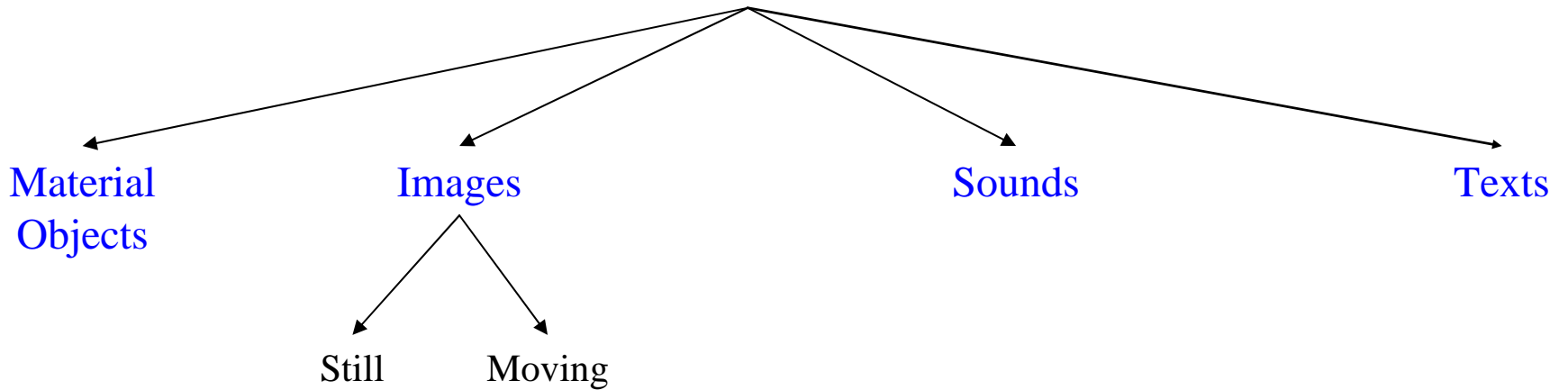
Where Do Qualitative Data Come From?

Techniques for Producing Qualitative Data

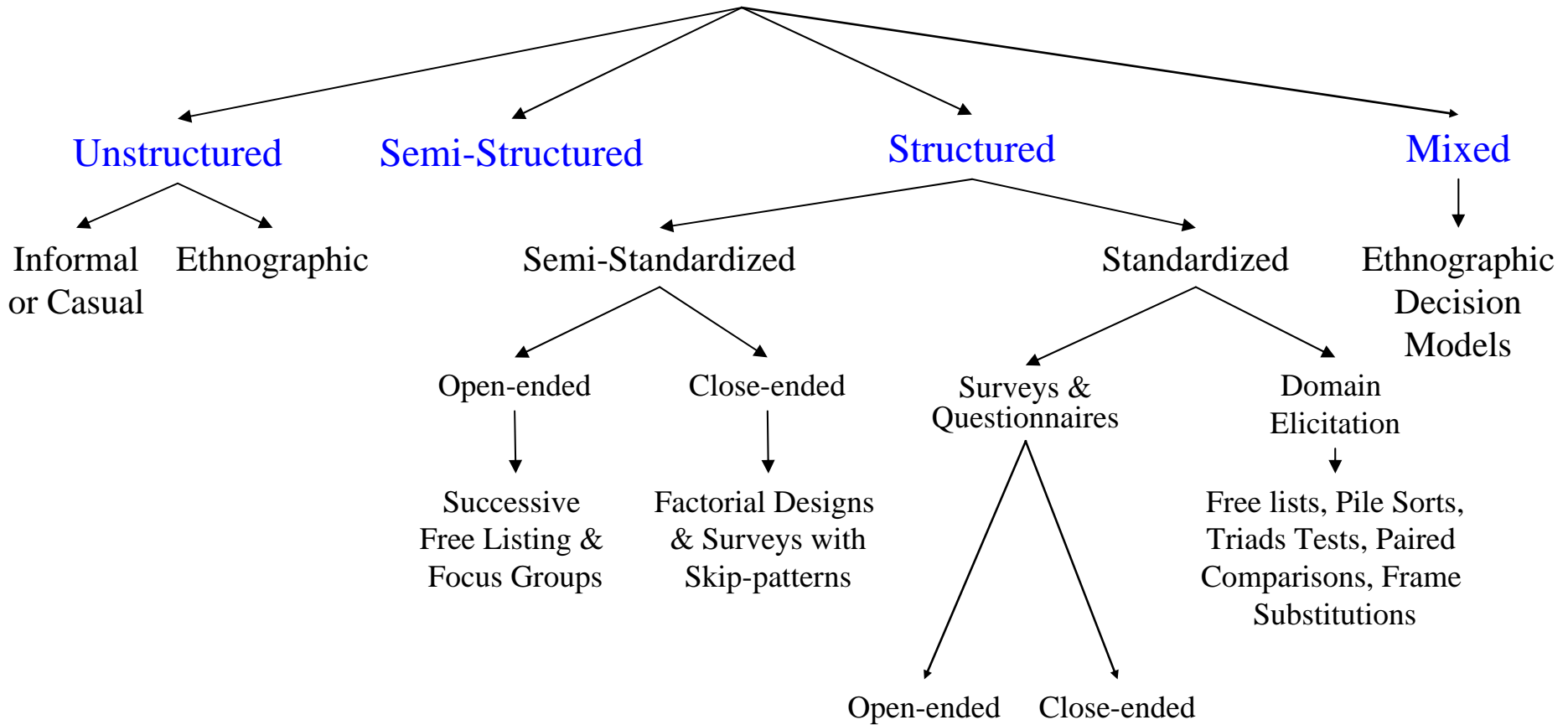


What Forms Do Qualitative Data Come In?

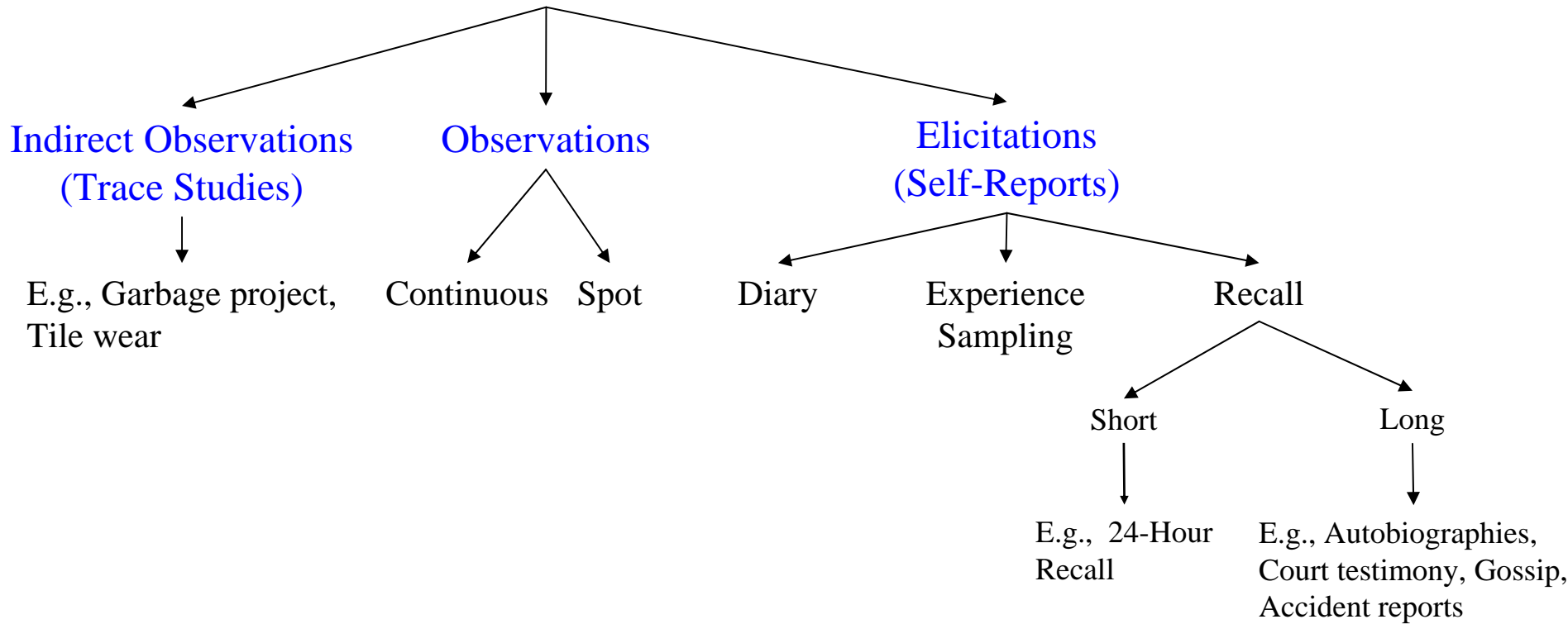
Collection Techniques Yield



Types of Elicitations



Ways to collect data on behaviors



Key Issues: Interview vs Question Characteristics

- Questions

- Open / Closed
- List / Relational
- Short / Medium / Long

- Interviews

- Unstructured / Semi-structured / Structured / Mixed
- Standardized / Non-Standardized
 - All respondents get the same questions
 - All respondents get the same questions in the same order
- Mode
 - Face-to-face
 - Phone
 - Mail
 - Web-based

Key Issues: Open vs. Closed Questions

- Open-ended questions

- Advantages

- Captures full range of responses
 - In respondent's own words
 - May be most appropriate way of understanding respondents' categories

- Disadvantages

- Non-responses are difficult or impossible to categorize (e.g., driving)
 - Labor intensive to code responses

- Close-ended questions

- Advantages

- Fewer non-responses
 - Easier to code

- Disadvantages

- Limited to investigator-determined categories
 - Limits the range of response variability and richness

Key Issues: List vs. Relational Data

- List Data

- Tell us what items exist in a domain or a topical area & how salient an item is (based on frequency and order of mention)
- Come from:
 - Standard free lists
 - Semi-structured interviews

- Relational Data

- Tell us how items are related to one another
 - Come from:
 - Structured interviews
 - Pile sorts
 - Paired comparisons
 - Semi-structured interviews
 - Compare and contrast questions
 - Mechanisms & processes questions
 - Narratives
- Triad tests
Frame-substitution tasks

Key Issues: Short vs. Long Responses

- **Types**

- **Short Responses**

- Word, phrases, or sentence answers to specific queries.
 - E.g., “What characteristics would you use to describe your son or daughter?” or “Why did you recycle (or not) the last aluminum can you had?”

- **Medium Responses**

- Short 1- to 2-paragraph sized descriptions of events, experiences, observations, etc.
 - E.g., “Please describe the last time you had a cold or flu?”

- **Long Responses**

- E.g., Life histories, immigration histories, published novels, stories, speeches, etc.

- **Uses**

- Long responses are better for finding new themes and identifying relationships, & they also provide more details for thorough descriptions
 - Short responses are often pithy
 - Long responses are not necessarily better for making comparisons.
 - Shorter responses are easier to code
 - Tend to be less variance when coding for presence/absence in long responses

Additional Considerations in Data Collection

- **Data Complexity:**
 - Total number of questions
 - Portion of unstructured questions
 - Number and size of answers
 - Number of speakers
- **Data Distance**
 - Information lost during recording process
 - Video, Audio, Transcripts, Fieldnotes
 - Error occurs during archiving process
 - Informant-Generated Errors
 - Data is misconstrued in recording events
 - Data is misconstrued when retrieved from memory
 - Research-Generated Errors
 - Biased field notes

Unstructured Interviews

Informal or Casual Interviews

- “Hanging Out”
- Key part of participant observation
- Respondents may not know you are conducting research
- Unstructured in that respondent has great deal of control over questions
- Often used in preliminary phases, but can be used throughout research

Ethnographic Interviews

- Both parties know the encounter is an interview
- Allows for longer and more in-depth questions and probes
- Ideal when respondent can be interviewed multiple times

Semi-Structured Interviews

Types of Questions

– Lists

- **“Why”** (e.g., “Why did you decide to join the military?”)
- **Description of things not related to time** (e.g., “Can you describe the problems you’ve had with your health care provider?”)

– Relational

- **Compare & contrast across people, space & time** (e.g., “How is this episode of asthma different from the previous episode?”)
- **Frames** (e.g., “How is X related to Y?”)

– Process

- **Mechanisms** (e.g., “Describe the steps you have to pass through to process an application for welfare.”)
- **“How”** (e.g., “How did you decide to join the military?”)
- **Descriptions of events** (e.g., “Describe how your illness progressed.”)

Semi-Structured Interviews

Funnel Interviews

– Grand-Tour Question

- “Please recall the last time that you had a cold or the flu and describe the episode in as much detail as possible.”
 - **List data:** Salient components & larger context
 - **Relational data:** Interaction among salient components

– Mini-Tour Questions

- **Signs/Symptoms:** “What signs and symptoms did you have?” [**List Data**]
- **Causation:** “What you think caused the illness?” [**List Data**]
- **Treatment:** “Please describe what you did about the illness from start to finish.” [**Relational Data: What & When**]
- **Social Support:** “Please describe how other people assisted you in your illness.” [**Relational Data: Who & What**]

– Close-Ended Checklists & Survey Items

Responses from a Semi-Structured Interview

Grand-Tour Question (from James Bradley)

- Question: “Please describe the last time that you had a cold or the flu.”
- Answer: “This happened exactly 31 days ago. I remember this so well because the 1st day was also the 1st day that I quit smoking. My girlfriend and young child had already been affected and were recovering from the following symptoms: itchy throat and cough, stomach cramps, fever. The 1st day was not bad right away. I called in sick to work but I was really planning to use the opportunity to study for an exam the next day. To my surprise, by 5 PM I was bed ridden. The next day I was worse. I went to my exam, but I performed poorly. I skipped the rest of my classes. It was at this time that I realized I could use this as an opportunity to quit smoking. So far I have been successful. By Wednesday evening I was fine.”

Why Use Grand-Tour Questions?

- **Grand-Tour Question**

- Question: “Please describe the last time that you had a cold or the flu.”
- Answer: “This happened exactly 31 days ago. I remember this so well because the 1st day was also the 1st day that I quit smoking. My girlfriend and young child had already been affected and were recovering from the following symptoms: itchy throat and cough, stomach cramps, fever. The 1st day was not bad right away. I called in sick to work but I was really planning to use the opportunity to study for an exam the next day. To my surprise, by 5 PM I was bed ridden. The next day I was worse. I went to my exam, but I performed poorly. I skipped the rest of my classes. It was at this time that I realized I could use this as an opportunity to quit smoking. So far I have been successful. By Wednesday evening I was fine.”

- **Grand-tour answers often place event in a larger context and elicit data you would never have thought to ask about.**

Responses from a Semi-Structured Interview

- **Mini-Tour Questions**
 - **Signs/Symptoms:** “What signs and symptoms did you have?”
 - Answer: “Sore throat, stomachache, fever.”
 - **Causation:** “What you think caused the illness and why?”
 - Answer: “Some sort of infection, b/c I believe I caught this sometime after the rest of my family.”
 - **Treatment:** “Please describe what you did about the illness from start to finish.”
 - Answer: “I rested when I felt like I needed it and took a lot of vitamins C and E.”
 - **Social Support:** “Please describe how other people assisted you in your illness (e.g., giving advice or helping you).”
 - Answer: “Emotional support.”
- **Answers to mini-tour questions supplement and further focus grand-tour answers**

Probes

The Silent Probe (*non-specific*)

Just remain quiet and wait for an informant to continue. The silence may be accompanied by a nod or by a mumbled “uh-huh” as you focus on your note pad.

The Echo Probe (*non-specific*)

Simply repeat the last thing someone has said, and asking them to continue. “I see. The goat’s throat is cut and the blood is drained into a pan for cooking with the meat. Then what happens?”

The Uh-huh Probe (*non-specific*)

Encourage an informant to continue with a narrative by just making affirmative comments, like “Uh-huh,” or “Yes, I see,” or “Right, uh-huh,” etc.

The Tell-Me-More Probe (*non-specific*)

Most common form of probe among experienced interviewers. Respondents give you an answer, and you probe for more by saying: “Could you tell me more about that?” Other variations include “Why exactly do you say that?” and “Why exactly do you feel that way?”

Probes

The Long Question Probe

Induce longer and more continuous responses by making your questions longer. Instead of asking “How do you plant a home garden?” ask “What are all the things you have to do to actually get a home garden going?” (Similar to grand tour questions describe above.)

Probing by Leading

When you feel as though you have learned something important about a group and its culture, the next step to test that knowledge—to see if it is idiosyncratic to a particular informant or subgroup in the culture or if it can be reproduced in many informants.

Baiting: The Phased-Assertion Probe

This is when you act like you already know something in order to get people to open up. Every journalist (and gossip monger) knows this technique well. As you learn a piece of a puzzle from one informant, you use it with the next informant to get more information; and so on. Phased assertion also prompts some informants to jump in and correct you if they think you know a little, but that you’ve “got it all wrong.” In some cases, I’ve purposely made wrong assertions to provoke a correcting response.

Focus Groups

Advantages

- Good way to generate range of perspectives
- Good for listening to how people talk to each other (but best for advanced stage of research)
- Provide a “general feel” for consensus among group and for contentious issues

Disadvantages

- Terrible method for understanding variance within a group
 - Never trust an article that says that x% of the participants said “blah, blah, blah...”
- Lack of independence
 - Group dynamics influence what people say and don’t say
 - Not everyone participates fully
- If you want to compare across group categories (men/women, ethnic group, etc.), you will need at least 3 focus groups/category

Fixes

- Ask participants to complete short questionnaire with key open-ended questions
 - Help get people thinking about topics to be discussed
 - Independent data that can be coded, counted, and summarized

The Basics of Qualitative Analysis

- **Identifying themes**
- **Describing themes**
- **Building and applying codebooks**
- **Make comparisons**
- **Building and testing models**