

THIRD EDITION

# RESEARCH DESIGN

Qualitative, Quantitative,  
and Mixed Methods Approaches

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Begin studying good writing about research using qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods designs. In good writing, the eye does not pause and the mind does not stumble on a passage. In this present book, I have attempted to draw examples of good prose from human and social science journals, such as *American Journal of Sociology*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *American Educational Research Journal*, *Sociology of Education*, and *Image: Journal of Nursing Scholarship*. In the qualitative area, good literature serves to illustrate clear prose and detailed passages. Individuals who teach qualitative research assign well-known books from literature, such as *Moby Dick*, *The Scarlet Letter*, and *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, as reading assignments (Webb & Glesne, 1992). *Qualitative Inquiry*, *Qualitative Research*, *Symbolic Interaction*, *Qualitative Family Research*, and *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* represent good, scholarly journals to examine. When using mixed methods research, examine journals that report studies with combined qualitative and quantitative research and data, including many social science journals, such as *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, *Field Methods*, and *Quality and Quantity*. Examine the numerous articles cited in the *Handbook of Mixed Methods in the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

### ETHICAL ISSUES TO ANTICIPATE

In addition to conceptualizing the writing process for a proposal, researchers need to anticipate the ethical issues that may arise during their studies (Hesse-Biber & Leavey, 2006). Research does involve collecting data from people, about people (Punch, 2005). As mentioned earlier, writing about these issues is required in making an argument for a study as well as being an important topic in the format for proposals. Researchers need to protect their research participants; develop a trust with them; promote the integrity of research; guard against misconduct and impropriety that might reflect on their organizations or institutions; and cope with new, challenging problems (Isreal & Hay, 2006). Ethical questions are apparent today in such issues as personal disclosure, authenticity and credibility of the research report, the role of researchers in cross-cultural contexts, and issues of personal privacy through forms of Internet data collection (Isreal & Hay, 2006).

In the literature, ethical issues arise in discussions about codes of professional conduct for researchers and in commentaries about ethical dilemmas and their potential solutions (Punch, 2005). Many national associations have published standards or **codes of ethics** on their Web sites for professionals in their fields. For example, see

- Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct, written in 2002, available at [www.apa.org/ethics](http://www.apa.org/ethics)

- The American Sociological Association Code of Ethics, adopted in 1997, available at [www.asanet.org](http://www.asanet.org)
- The American Anthropological Association's Code of Ethics, approved in June 1998, available at [www.aaanet.org](http://www.aaanet.org)
- The American Educational Research Association Ethical Standards of the American Educational Research Association, 2002, available at [www.aera.net](http://www.aera.net)
- The American Nurses Association Code of Ethics for Nurses—Provisions, approved in June 2001, and available at [www.ana.org](http://www.ana.org)

Ethical practices involve much more than merely following a set of static guidelines, such as those provided by professional associations. Writers need to anticipate and address any ethical dilemmas that may arise in their research (e.g., see Berg, 2001; Punch, 2005; and Sieber, 1998). These issues apply to qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research and to all stages of research. Proposal writers need to anticipate them and actively address them in their research plans. In the chapters that follow in Part II, I refer to ethical issues in many stages of research. By mentioning them at this point, I hope to encourage the proposal writer to actively design them into sections of a proposal. Although these discussions will not comprehensively cover all ethical issues, they address major ones. These issues arise primarily in specifying the research problem (Chapter 5); identifying a purpose statement and research questions (Chapters 6 and 7); and collecting, analyzing, and writing up the results of data (Chapters 8, 9, and 10).

### **Ethical Issues in the Research Problem**

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) ask, "How do ethical issues enter into your selection of a research problem?" (p. 86). In writing an introduction to a study, the researcher identifies a significant problem or issue to study and presents a rationale for its importance. During the identification of the research problem, it is important to identify a problem that will benefit individuals being studied, one that will be meaningful for others besides the researcher (Punch, 2005). A core idea of action/participatory research is that the inquirer will not further marginalize or disempower the study participants. To guard against this, proposal developers can conduct pilot projects to establish trust and respect with the participants so that inquirers can detect any marginalization before the proposal is developed and the study begun.

### **Ethical Issues in the Purpose and Questions**

In developing the purpose statement or the central intent and questions for a study, proposal developers need to convey the purpose of the study that will be described to the participants (Sarantakos, 2005). Deception

occurs when participants understand one purpose but the researcher has a different purpose in mind. It is also important for researchers to specify the sponsorship of their study. For example, in designing cover letters for survey research, sponsorship is an important element in establishing trust and credibility for a mailed survey instrument.

### Ethical Issues in Data Collection

As researchers anticipate data collection, they need to respect the participants and the sites for research. Many ethical issues arise during this stage of the research.

Do not put participants at risk, and respect vulnerable populations. Researchers need to have their research plans reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) on their college and university campuses. IRB committees exist on campuses because of federal regulations that provide protection against human rights violations. For a researcher, the IRB process requires assessing the potential for risk, such as physical, psychological, social, economic, or legal harm (Sieber, 1998), to participants in a study. Also, the researcher needs to consider the special needs of vulnerable populations, such as minors (under the age of 19), mentally incompetent participants, victims, persons with neurological impairments, pregnant women or fetuses, prisoners, and individuals with AIDS. Investigators file research proposals containing the procedures and information about the participants with the IRB campus committee so that the board can review the extent to which the research being proposed subjects individuals to risk. In addition to this proposal, the researcher develops an **informed consent form** for participants to sign before they engage in the research. This form acknowledges that participants' rights will be protected during data collection. Elements of this consent form include the following (Sarantakos, 2005):

- Identification of the researcher
- Identification of the sponsoring institution
- Indication of how the participants were selected
- Identification of the purpose of the research
- Identification of the benefits for participating
- Identification of the level and type of participant involvement
- Notation of risks to the participant
- Guarantee of confidentiality to the participant
- Assurance that the participant can withdraw at any time
- Provision of names of persons to contact if questions arise

One issue to anticipate about confidentiality is that some participants may not want to have their identity remain confidential. By permitting this, the researcher allows the participants to retain ownership of their voices and exert their independence in making decisions. They do, however, need to be well informed about the possible risks of nonconfidentiality, such as the inclusion of data in the final report that they may not have expected, information that infringes on the rights of others that should remain concealed, and so forth (Giordano, O'Reilly, Taylor, & Dogra, 2007).

- Other ethical procedures during data collection involve gaining the agreement of individuals in authority (e.g., gatekeepers) to provide access to study participants at research sites. This often involves writing a letter that identifies the extent of time, the potential impact, and the outcomes of the research. Use of Internet responses gained through electronic interviews or surveys needs permission from participants. This might be gained through first obtaining permission and then sending out the interview or survey.

- Researchers need to respect research sites so that they are left undisturbed after a research study. This requires that inquirers, especially in qualitative studies involving prolonged observation or interviewing at a site, be cognizant of their impact and minimize their disruption of the physical setting. For example, they might time visits so that they intrude little on the flow of activities of participants. Also, organizations often have guidelines that provide guidance for conducting research without disturbing their settings.

- In experimental studies, investigators need to collect data so that all participants, not only an experimental group, benefit from the treatments. This may require providing *some* treatment to all groups or staging the treatment so that ultimately all groups receive the beneficial treatment.

- An ethical issue arises when there is not reciprocity between the researcher and the participants. Both the researcher and the participants should benefit from the research. In some situations, power can easily be abused and participants can be coerced into a project. Involving individuals collaboratively in the research may provide reciprocity. Highly collaborative studies, popular in qualitative research, may engage participants as co-researchers throughout the research process, such as the design, data collection and analysis, report writing, and dissemination of the findings (Patton, 2002).

- Interviewing in qualitative research is increasingly being seen as a moral inquiry (Kvale, 2007). As such, interviewers need to consider how the interview will improve the human situation (as well as enhance scientific knowledge), how a sensitive interview interaction may be stressful for the participants, whether participants have a say in how their statements

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are interpreted, how critically the interviewees might be questioned, and what the consequences of the interview for the interviewees and the groups to which they belong might be.

- Researchers also need to anticipate the possibility of harmful, intimate information being disclosed during the data collection process. It is difficult to anticipate and try to plan for the impact of this information during or after an interview (Patton, 2002). For example, a student may discuss parental abuse or prisoners may talk about an escape. Typically in these situations, the ethical code for researchers (which may be different for schools and prisons) is to protect the privacy of the participants and to convey this protection to all individuals involved in a study.

### **Ethical Issues in Data Analysis and Interpretation**

When the researcher analyzes and interprets both quantitative and qualitative data, issues emerge that call for good ethical decisions. In anticipating a research study, consider the following:

- How will the study protect the anonymity of individuals, roles, and incidents in the project? For example, in survey research, investigators dissociate names from responses during the coding and recording process. In qualitative research, inquirers use aliases or pseudonyms for individuals and places, to protect identities.

- Data, once analyzed, need to be kept for a reasonable period of time (e.g., Sieber, 1998, recommends 5–10 years). Investigators should then discard the data so that it does not fall into the hands of other researchers who might misappropriate it.

- The question of who owns the data once it is collected and analyzed also can be an issue that splits research teams and divides individuals against each other. A proposal might mention this issue of ownership and discuss how it will be resolved, such as through the development of a clear understanding between the researcher, the participants, and possibly the faculty advisers (Punch, 2005). Berg (2001) recommends the use of personal agreements to designate ownership of research data. An extension of this idea is to guard against sharing the data with individuals not involved in the project.

- In the interpretation of data, researchers need to provide an accurate account of the information. This accuracy may require debriefing between the researcher and participants in quantitative research (Berg, 2001). It may include, in qualitative research, using one or more of the strategies to check the accuracy of the data with participants or across different data sources (see validation strategies in Chapter 9).

### Ethical Issues in Writing and Disseminating the Research

The ethical issues do not stop with data collection and analysis; issues apply as well to the actual writing and dissemination of the final research report. For example,

- Discuss how the research will not use language or words that are biased against persons because of gender, sexual orientation, racial or ethnic group, disability, or age. The APA (2001) *Publication Manual* suggests three guidelines. First, present unbiased language at an appropriate level of specificity (e.g., rather than say, "The client's behavior was typically male," state, "the client's behavior was \_\_\_\_\_ [specify]"). Second, use language that is sensitive to labels (e.g., rather than "400 Hispanics", indicate "400 Mexicans, Spaniards, and Puerto Ricans"). Third, acknowledge participants in a study (e.g., rather than "subject," use the word "participant," and rather than "woman doctor" use "doctor" or "physician").
- Other ethical issues in writing the research will involve the potential of suppressing, falsifying, or inventing findings to meet a researcher's or an audience's needs. These fraudulent practices are not accepted in professional research communities, and they constitute scientific misconduct (Neuman, 2000). A proposal might contain a proactive stance by the researcher to not engage in these practices.
- In planning a study, it is important to anticipate the repercussions of conducting the research on certain audiences and not to misuse the results to the advantage of one group or another. The researcher needs to provide those at the research site with a preliminary copy of any publications from the research (Creswell, 2007).
- An important issue in writing a scholarly manuscript is to not exploit the labor of colleagues and to provide authorship to individuals who substantially contribute to publications. Isreal and Hay (2006) discuss the unethical practice of so-called gift authorship to individuals who do not contribute to a manuscript and ghost authorship, in which junior staff who made significant contributions have been omitted from the list of authors.
- Finally, it is important to release the details of the research with the study design so that readers can determine for themselves the credibility of the study (Neuman, 2000). Detailed procedures for quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research will be emphasized in the chapters to follow. Also, researchers should not engage in duplicate or redundant publication in which authors publish papers that present exactly the same data, discussions, and conclusions and do not offer new material. Some biomedical journals now require authors to declare whether they have published or are preparing to publish papers that are closely related to the manuscript that has been submitted (Isreal & Hay, 2006).

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## **SUMMARY**

It is helpful to consider how to write a research proposal before actually engaging in the process. Consider the nine arguments advanced by Maxwell (2005) as the key elements to include and then use one of the four topical outlines provided to craft a thorough qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods proposal.

In proposal development, begin putting words down on paper to think through ideas; establish the habit of writing on a regular basis; and use strategies such as applying consistent terms, different levels of narrative thoughts, and coherence to strengthen writing. Writing in the active voice, using strong verbs, and revising and editing will help as well.

Before writing the proposal, it is useful to consider the ethical issues that can be anticipated and described in the proposal. These issues relate to all phases of the research process. With consideration for participants, research sites, and potential readers, studies can be designed that contain ethical practices.