

Analyzing Records

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PS 585
Research Methods

Today's Blueprint

Last Class:

- Non-Experimental Research Designs
 - Experimental vs. non-experimental designs
 - Types of non-experimental designs

Today's Class:

- Analyzing Records:
 - What are records?
 - What types of records do researchers analyze
 - How do researchers analyze records?

What are Records?

Think: source(s) and content(s) of communication

What are Records?

- Records = Communications
- Records tell you about:
 - Sources of communication
 - Content of communication

What are Records?

The *Source(s)* of Communication:

- How people/organizations communicate information
- Defined broadly
 - Written records (transcripts, statistics, etc.)
 - Visual records (advertisements, pictures, etc.)
 - Audio records (speeches, music, etc.)
 - All of the above (videos, films, Internet, etc.)

What are Records?

- Take home point:
 - Sources of communication are practically everywhere!!!
 - There are records of practically everything!!!
 - The sky's the limit ☺

What are Records?

The *Content(s)* of Communication:

- What people/organizations communicate
 - The "message"
- What you get when you process records
 - Processed using *qualitative* or *quantitative* techniques

What are Records?

Caveat:

- This course will focus on the quantitative analysis of records

Types of Records

Think: running and episodic records

Types of Records

- Two types:
 - Episodic records
 - Running records

Types of Records

1) Running Records:

- Records that *are* part of an on-going record-keeping project

Types of Records

- Cheaper
- Accessible
- Longitudinal data
- No say-so in data collection
- Limited access
- Uncertain record keeping practices

Types of Records

2) Episodic Records:

- Records that *are not* part of an on-going record-keeping project

Types of Records

- Historical data
- Expensive/time consuming
- Secondary sources
- Limited access
- Uncertain record keeping practices

Analyzing Records

Think: content analysis

Analyzing Records

- What is content analysis?
 - The practice of categorizing communication content into certain themes based on certain rules
- What purpose does it serve?
 - Content analysis is *codified common sense*—a set of procedures used to classify, summarize, and explain aspects of the world

Analyzing Records

Uses of content analysis:

- Content analysis is very versatile:
 - Descriptive analysis
 - Theory-building
 - Testing hypotheses

Analyzing Records

- Researchers can use content analysis for descriptive purposes like:
 - Describing a particular message
 - Drawing conclusions about the content of a message based on these description

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- Researchers can use content analysis for theory-building purposes like:
 - Answering research questions
 - Testing hypotheses

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- When testing hypotheses, researchers can use content analysis in one of two ways:
 - To test relationships among variables *within* content analyze (content variables)
 - To test relationships among content variables and variables *beyond* the analysis (non-content variables)

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- Point #3 speaks to the “centrality” of content (Riffe, Lacy, and Fico 1998)
 - Researchers can use content analysis to address research questions or test hypotheses among *content* and *non-content* variables.

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- Most researchers do descriptive content analysis (no inferences)
- Those who draw inferences from content seldom test relationships between content variables
- Those who test hypotheses seldom test relationships between content and non-content variables

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- However:
 - We can use content analysis to test relationships between variables that are internal and external to the analysis.

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- Therefore:
 - Content variables can serve as either the cause or the effect in your hypotheses

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- Recap:
 - Communication sources are practically everywhere
 - There are records of practically everything
 - You can make sense of these records with content analysis
 - Content analysis can apply to content both inside and outside the analysis
 - Content can be on both sides of the causal arrow

Analyzing Records

Strengths ☺

- Provides alternative when direct observation is not possible
- Can gather data on a variety of topics
- Unobtrusive
- Non-reactive data
- Low cost
- Faithful record keeping allows for longitudinal analyses

Weaknesses ☹

- Selective survival
- Incomplete records
- Limited access
- Biased content
- No standards for record keeping
- Results are open to interpretation
- Time/labor intensive

References

- FYI:
 - Denzin, Norman and Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds. 2000. Handbook of Qualitative Research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

- Riffe, Daniel, Steve Lacy, and Fred Fico. 1998. Analyzing Media Messages. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Rodson, C. 2002. Real World Research (2nd ed.). Great Britain: Blackwell Publishers.
- Schwandt, Thomas. 2001. Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry, 2nd Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications