Observational Methods

Experimental Psychology

Arlo Clark-Foos
Observational Methods

• Quantitative vs. Qualitative

  – Public/Existing data sets

  – Focus Groups, Field Work
Naturalistic Observation

• Description and Interpretation
  – Thorough
  – Detailed
  – Repeated Behaviors, Multiple Observers
  – Often Qualitative
Naturalistic Observation

• Issues
  – Participation and Concealment
    • Nonparticipant observer
  – Defining the Scope of the Observation
  – Limits of
    • Scheduling
    • No Control

• Negative Case Analysis
  – Outlier
Systematic Observation

Careful observation of one or more specific behaviors in a particular setting

Example: Type of Play in Children

- Unoccupied
- Solitary
- Together
- Parallel Play
- Group Play
Coding Systems

• Quantifies behavior
• Agreement between coders
  – Interrater reliability
• Should be Simple
Methodological Issues

• Equipment
• Reactivity
• Reliability
• Sampling
Case Studies

- One individual
- Psychobiography
Archival Research

- Statistical Records
  - ETS, Census, DOT, DOD, DOE, USDA, GNP, etc.
- Survey Archives
  - General Social Survey
- Written and Mass Communication Records
  - Diary of Anne Frank
- Content Analysis