Embracing Interpretivism: A Personal Journey into Understanding and Conducting Qualitative Research

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In my academic path, I have realized that my personal experience and the variety in the social context I have been exposed to have shaped my vision greatly. As I have thought about these experiences, I have been more and more in a position of interpretive research tradition, a position that acknowledges many, socially constructed realities. First, in this essay, I show how my background has caused me to value subjective meaning, context, and the co-creation of knowledge. I then discuss the best practices and the high-quality research within this interpretive framework, that is methodological rigor, reflexivity, and the authentic engagement of participants. Finally, this discussion shows how research, under interpretation, can be a highly useful approach to shed light on the intricate and multiple aspects of human life experience.

I started developing an interpretivist worldview through early experiences that pushed me to question basic one-dimensional interpretations of social phenomena. Growing up in a multicultural environment, I was exposed to a rich tapestry of beliefs, values, and practices that defied easy categorization. That is how my journey in the Interpretivist worldview started. Coming from a multicultural community, I learned about a vibrant series of beliefs, values, and practices that could not be easily grouped. Throughout my high school years, I was a part of the community volunteer program where I came into contact closely with people from various backgrounds. The primary point of these interactions was that lived experience is inherently contextualized and how people understand their lives is always mediated by their cultural, and social environments. This insight matched the heart of interpretive ideas that state that reality is not a single, objective entity, but a tapestry of interpretations determined by individual views (Creswell, 2013; Neuman, 2014).

An instance in which this research tradition became intimate for me was in a project that entailed documenting community members' narratives. For each one of the stories I heard, I found out that no matter how similar the experiences were, no two accounts would be the same. All the narratives that I read had their own personal biases and emotions and even historical context associated with them. This diversity of interpretation enhanced the notion that representing human behavior has to have more to do with qualitative and empathetic gathering of experienced lives instead of purely quantification. Moving towards interpretivism, I realized that what would hold me back from this stance is merely the strength of subjective insights, which would enhance the depth of research findings. Thus, I choose the qualitative method as it aligns best with my interpretive worldview and research goals.

The above also reinforces my personal experiences as an interpretivist. As has been long argued by scholars such as (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), human behavior cannot be fully captured in positivist terms; they aim to capture through numbers and statistics that generalize. Rather, they concentrate on the importance of context, dialogue, and the researcher's reflexivity within their notion of knowledge. This made me believe that the best of research is to see research as involving the interplay between researcher and subject and as a necessarily subjective human experience. For this reason, interpretive research pays attention to what the individual says and is able to find out more subtle meanings to social actions.

Some of the interrelated principles that define best practices in high-quality research within the interpretivist tradition are mentioned. The foremost one is the requirement of methodological rigor that match with the research question approached. Interpretivist research of high quality is not statistical generalizable, but is striving to reach a degree of understanding that can shed light on the peculiarities of the behavior of human beings. In general, the techniques are used to explore complex social phenomena within their natural settings since they can depict how people are involved in such phenomena in a way that is natural to them (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Neuman, 2014). These methods provide great access to the lived realities in which these participants reside, and offer the richness of detail almost of these lived experiences.

A second important aspect of best practice within this tradition is the process of reflexivity. Reflexivity concerns the researcher's continuous affair of self-examination of whether or not how the background, biases, and preconceptions would have somehow infiltrated into the research process and data processing. I have recently been drawn into my own research experience and found it essential to consider my positionality (as constituted by my social identity, my belief systems, and my experiences) in caring and legitimate research with others. This reflective practice going in the other direction minimizes bias and increases the trustworthiness of the research findings by exposing the researcher's influence in the study (Creswell, 2013).

In addition, interpretive research is reputed to be high quality because it creates dialogue between the researcher and the participants. The way of proceeding with the research process is not one-sided extraction of information, rather, the researcher is an active cooperator in the generation of knowledge. The authenticity of the experiences of the participants is preserved in this collaborative process as we let the findings be based on their own words and

complex contexts. To enhance the credibility of the study, strategies such as member checking (where participants examine and confirm the validity of the findings) are often used (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Not only is this dialogue and feedback iterative process a validation of the research outcomes, but it allows the participants to have a voice in how their stories are represented.

Just like in high-quality research of the interpretive paradigm, it requires the right balance between creativity and systematic analysis. The interpretivist one is the one that celebrates the experience of people as unique, as context specific. It, though, requires that the researcher apply systematic and transparent analysis of data. It is achieved using coding, thematic analysis, etc., which enable grouping and making sense of the huge qualitative data. In the work that I have done myself using these methods, these methods allow for a very rigorous analysis of the data without losing the richness and power that personal narratives have. The ability to achieve such a balance between how creative the interpretation is and how structured the analysis is—what the researchers see as the best of both worlds—may allow researchers to get deep insight into the topic of interest and rigorous methodological soundness.

Additionally, ethical matters are very important in interpretive research. Researchers are particularly sensitive to the exploration of sensitive topics, yet one of the predominant themes of making personal narratives lends itself to the issue of respecting participants' dignity, privacy, and autonomy. I found that transparency about the research process, obtaining informed consent, and protecting participants' confidentiality are all important practices, not only protection of participants but for the whole research process. As (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) indicate that ethical rigor is never separated from methodological rigor in qualitative research and therefore the validity of findings is always compromised by a lack of ethical standards.

In the ending of my writing for making summary or conclusion, I know that my interpretive worldview has not only led me to the way I see the world but also the way I have done research. From it, I have learned that I do not need to start by collecting data to learn about human behavior but they should start with the experience of the millions of humans and thinking humanly and reflexively about ethical practice. From this perspective, high-quality research is not grounded in how exactly the work was done, but rather in how the data were gathered and measured in such a way that respects the way those being studied lived.

In all, the human experience of life and the context surrounding it has guided me to an interpretive research tradition that sees the subjective as valuable. I have spent many hours, working with sensitivity and with methodological rigor, personal narratives and have seen how they can lead to deep insights into the complexities of social life. Using qualitative methods within this traditional best practice involves employing methods that allow very deep engagement with participants, maintaining a reflective posture regarding the researcher's biases, and rigorous adherence to ethics in the researcher process. An approach of such type not only broadens our knowledge of the phenomena under study but also makes the research flexible in interacting with the particularities of human experience.

Aliasing my worldview to interpretivism has been a challenging and fulfilling journey. This has forced me to question my thinking and to realize that there are multiple ways of seeing in any social setting. In the end, I think of high-quality research as an insistence on authenticity, ethical integrity, and nuance of the social world. In return, this promise has come to define my academic self and influenced the direction in which I try to contribute to how we understand human behaviors as an ever-shrinking planet.

References

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