

## **Qualitative versus Quantitative Methods: Understanding Why Qualitative Methods are Superior for Criminology and Criminal Justice**

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### **Abstract**

The development of knowledge is important for criminology and criminal justice. Two predominant types of methods are available for criminologists' to use--quantitative and qualitative methods. The value, appropriateness and necessity of using qualitative methods is discussed. Because of the unique contributions – depth of understandings being primary -- that qualitative methods can provide it is argued that such approaches should be used more frequently, be more frequently and strongly valued and seen as unique, often superior approaches to the creation of criminological and criminal justice knowledge.

Qualitative research, one of the two primary approaches to the conduct of social science research, is a superior means for conducting meaningful research in criminology and criminal justice. The numerous advantages of qualitative methods provide a depth of understanding of crime, criminals and justice system operations and processing that far exceeds that offered by detached, statistical analyses. Because of the differences in the data, how data is collected and analyzed, and what the data and analyses are able to tell us about our subjects of study, the knowledge gained through qualitative investigations is more informative, richer and offers enhanced understandings compared to that which can be obtained via quantitative research.

The superiority of qualitative research arises from the core differences in what qualitative and quantitative research are, and what they are able to contribute to bodies of knowledge. At the core, qualitative research focuses on the meanings, traits and defining characteristics of

events, people, interactions, settings/cultures and experience. As one leading proponent of qualitative methods has explained, “Quality refers to the what, how, when, and where of a thing – its essence and ambience. Qualitative research thus refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things.” (Berg, 2007, p. 3). Notice that what is missing from this definition is the “amount” or quantity of whatever it is that is being studied. The number, or numerical descriptions of things and their relationships is not the focus of qualitative research, that is the focus of the “other” form of social science research: quantitative methods.

Quantitative research is typically considered to be the more “scientific” approach to doing social science. The focus is on using specific definitions and carefully operationalizing what particular concepts and variables mean. Qualitative research methods provide more emphasis on interpretation and providing consumers with complete views, looking at contexts, environmental immersions and a depth of understanding of concepts

So, why should social scientists use qualitative methods? What is the benefit of such an approach to the study of crime and criminal justice? In simple terms, qualitative methods are about gaining true understandings of the social aspects of how crime occurs and how the agents, structures and processes of responding to crime operate in culturally-grounded contexts. Qualitative methods provide a depth of understanding of issues that is not possible through the use of quantitative, statistically-based investigations. Qualitative methods are the approach that centralizes and places primary value on complete understandings, and how people (the social aspect of our discipline) understand, experience and operate within milieus that are dynamic, and social in their foundation and structure.

This is not to say that all social scientists recognize and value qualitative research, nor do all social scientists believe that what qualitative methods offer is superior to quantitative methods, or even contributing to the foundations that establish a body of knowledge. For many scholars of criminology and criminal justice qualitative research is inferior to what can be gained from quantitative methods, and provides only anecdotal, non-scientific examples of marginally interesting and valuable insights. For many criminological and criminal justice researchers, qualitative research is the realm of pseudo-science, and provides little or no value for addressing how crime and societal responses to crime transpire.

Qualitative research is not only the “weak” stepchild of the scientific community in the eyes of many criminology and criminal justice scholars, but is also numerically the rare method behind published scholarship in the field. As reviews of published research articles in criminology and criminal justice show, less than 11% of articles in top tier journals in the discipline employ qualitative methods (Buckler, in press; Tewksbury, DeMichele and Miller, 2005), and less than 15% of articles in non-top-tier criminal justice journals utilize and report results from qualitative studies (Buckler, in press; Tewksbury, DeMichele and Miller, 2005)

Although qualitative research is less common than quantitative research in criminology and criminal justice, it is recognized for the value and unique contributions it can make. Editors of scholarly journals in the discipline acknowledge that qualitative research is less common among the published scholarship in criminology and criminal justice, but they also acknowledge the importance of qualitative research. In fact, according to Buckler (in press), editors of criminology and criminal justice journals wish they had the opportunity to publish more qualitative research. However, the fact that only 5 - 10% of submitted manuscripts employ

qualitative methods not only leads to what many editors believe is a “quantitative bias” among reviewers, but there simply are not that many researchers doing the time intense work of qualitative data collection, analysis and reporting.

As Worrall (2000: 354) contends, one reason that quantitative research enjoys widespread heightened respect in the discipline “lies in the predictive advantages his method of inquiry possesses. Indeed, the ability to make correct predictions is one of the more outstanding characteristics of quantitative methodology.” Of course, to make such a claim Worrall (and other like-minded scholars) have to work from the assumption that prediction is necessarily a quantitative task. While one certainly can measure past and current events in the social world, and use what is and has been as a basis for predicting what will be, to do so does not require statistical analysis. After all, we all predict what our days and futures will be like, based on our own qualitative understanding of the settings and interactional networks we find ourselves enmeshed in on a daily basis. But, for our predictions to carry “weight”, it would be the contention of Worrall and others that we need to specify strengths of relationships so as to know “how likely” things are to be predicted accurately. Clearly, this is but one way of achieving such a goal, and not necessarily a superior means for achieving such a goal.

However, while the ability to predict what is to come is suggested as central to the (supposedly superior) value of quantitative research, those who advance such a view also find it important to defend against the fact that the efficacy of prediction in social sciences is marginal or tenuous at best. Prediction is based on theoretical grounds, and the testing of theoretical concepts, propositions and relationships. Such theories are the product of qualitative research; qualitative research creates the concepts and proposes the theories that are used to launch tests

and predictive models. However, this fact, that qualitative research provides the foundation for theoretical understandings is turned back on qualitative research as a weakness, demonstrating its inherent inferiority. Consequently, qualitative research is also marginalized and minimized in importance, at least in the minds of staunch quantitative adherents, for the role it plays in developing theory. Simply stated, because of the significance of qualitative research for theoretical development, it is therefore secondary in importance. In the words of Worrall (2000: 359), “qualitative research will remain secondary inasmuch as it excels, whether intentionally or not, at setting the theoretical stage for quantitative analysis.” Apparently providing the foundational knowledge and direction that quantitative research could and should pursue is not as important or valuable as actually being able to measure things. And, just to be sure that it is not possible to look to the poor predictive abilities demonstrated by much quantitative research, it is also contended that such failures are the result of the methods that produce the prediction. Rather, “where prediction errs – and where the connection between quantitative research and policy is tenuous -- it is because of flawed theory, not method.” (Worrall, 2000: 360). So, not only is the tree more important than the seed from which it grows, but so too should the seed be blamed when the tree fails to thrive and provide fruit, shade and other benefits. At least this is what is proposed by the defenders of quantitative analysis.

However, as those who have been trained in qualitative methods know when done well, qualitative research does provide valuable insights and advances to knowledge. The contributions of qualitative research differ from those of quantitative research; however, just because the contributions of each approach differ, this does not mean that one is not (equally) valuable. Qualitative methods produce knowledge that mutually complements that produced by quantitative research.

***What are the methods of qualitative research?***

Qualitative methods of research, while often viewed by novices as easier – because the actions of researchers look and sound a great deal like what we all do in regular daily life – are in fact more time consuming, require a greater emphasis on researchers themselves clarifying and defining what things mean, and rely on the intellectual abilities of researchers to organize, manage, analyze and interpret data. There is no one and only correct way to work with qualitative data. Rather, qualitative researchers are challenged to find meaningful ways to work with their data and identify patterns and trends in the data. While there are certainly general guidelines (often based on the successful experiences of previous qualitative researchers) for guiding how to work with qualitative data, the actual tasks and actions of data collection, analysis and interpretation require some degree of creativity and innovation.

The data that is used in qualitative research come from a range of collection methods. These include interviews with individuals, observations of people, places and actions/interactions, immersion in settings so as to understand the what, how, when and where and how of social structure and action/interaction, the analysis of media (written, spoken, drawn, etc.) content and guided conversations with groups of individuals (focus groups). Each of these approaches to data collection differ in the source(s) of information and what actual tasks the researcher does to collect information, yet all also include the idea of pulling together examples of the content of regularly encountered situations and things.

Interviews are (typically) structured conversations that researchers have with individuals. Just as in everyday life, one of the most productive ways to learn about a person, place, or set of activities is to actually ask questions of people who have knowledge about that topic. Interviews

are used to solicit information from people, just as quantitative researchers ask questions with surveys. However, the difference is that when a qualitative researcher asks questions of a person they are interested in understanding how the person being interviewed understands, experiences or views some topic. The quantitative researcher inquires about if and how a person knows something, and how that knowledge can be translated into a numeric value. This most frequently requires the use of closed-ended questions on surveys, limiting the possible answers to those identified by the researcher, not in whatever form of understanding the person being interviewed holds and can explain to the researcher doing the interview. In this way, interview data is “richer” than quantitative data in that not only does the researcher learn how the interviewee sees and knows something, but so too does the qualitative researcher get an explanation of that observation or knowledge. In short, interview data provides the answers that quantitative surveys questions produces, but qualitative interview based data also provides the answer in an unlimited range of possibilities and with an accompanying context.

Observation, the actual looking at and breaking down of actions and interactions of people, is an approach to data collection that looks quite simple and straightforward (afterall, we all do this as we go through our daily lives), but is actually a very challenging method for gathering systematic information about people, places and things. Researchers who draw on observational data do so in one of two general ways: overtly in which they openly acknowledge to those being observed that this is what the researcher is doing, and covertly, when the researcher “spies” on the people, places and things that she is studying. The approach that is used varies by the setting in which observations are conducted, and most importantly by the research questions being addressed (which will necessitate different things to be observed, some of which may not be accessible to an “outsider” who appears and proclaims that they want to see

what is going on). The challenge of observational data collection methods is to be able to simultaneously see both the obvious (e.g. large and surface level) actions involved and also to be able to look beyond the obvious and see those things which might always be present, but are so “normal” and taken for granted that the observer typically fails to note their presence. These challenges are most difficult in settings and with people and things for which the researcher is most familiar. That which is known to us on a regular basis is often seen with little attention to detail, or a failure to realize that details are important to the larger scheme of actions and interactions.

The actual data that an observational researcher collects (and later organizes and assesses for analysis and interpretation) are notes that the researcher takes while doing observation. To be able to take notes on everything one sees, and to be sure to get beyond the obvious, surface level of structure and events can be very challenging. Especially for researchers observing things covertly, identifying a means to simultaneously watch, think about what one sees, make notes that capture the details of actions and structures, and manage their own presence so as not to be detected presents a serious challenge that requires significant degrees of both intellectual abilities and expenditures of energy.

Immersion in a setting, for purposes of gaining an understanding of how that setting operates, is the data collection method that drives the production of ethnography. Originally advanced by anthropologists, ethnographic methods combine observational skills with interpersonal skills of navigating a new environment so as to find one’s way through a new world while learning how to be a non-disruptive presence in that new world. The ethnographer needs to take notes on what he experiences, sees, hears and his own actions and conversations

with others that serve to inform him of what is happening, and why it is happening as it is. The ethnographer typically spends protracted periods of time in the research setting, which itself can introduce serious stresses and challenges for the researcher. In the end, the ethnographer seeks to provide an analytic description of the setting under study that allows readers to not only understand how the setting is structured and operates, but also why it is the way that it is.

Content analysis is the examination of some form of media or communications for purposes of identifying how such messages reflect construct and are a part of culture. Scholars who engage in content analysis take as their data a collection of similar types of media (magazine articles, television sitcoms, suicide notes, criminal confessions, etc.) and work within a structured, systematic process to identify patterns and trends in what is included, what meanings are being communicated, the type of vocabulary/images used to convey particular types of messages or how various types of messages are contextualized within their particular form of media.

Content analysis is fairly unique among the qualitative methods in that it is often done utilizing quantitative analysis (see Larsen and Monarchi, 2004). While the data that are utilized in content analysis remain text, and the focus is to identify how meaning is constructed, replicated and communicated, there are ways to use counts and statistical relationships to identify common patterns and recurrences of text. In this regard, content analysis can provide data that can be analyzed using both qualitative (interpretive) and statistical approaches. However, in almost all instances, and especially when the product of such analysis is qualitative in focus, the emphasis remains on the meaning of text.

Focus groups, sometimes referred to as group interviews, are guided conversations in which a researcher (or research team) meets with a collection of similarly situated persons for purposes of uncovering information about a topic. The advantage of a focus group over a series of one on one interviews is that in the group setting the comments and statements of each participant are available to all other participants and can serve to stimulate memories, alternative interpretations and more depth of information that is likely to come from participants interacting and engaging with one another. In this regard the focus group provides not only the data that likely would be generated in a series of individual interviews, but when focus groups work well, they yield yet more in-depth information from the participants interacting among themselves, building on and replying to the comments of one another and having their experiences and interpretations of events and actions questioned (and thereby pushing them to greater clarity and thoroughness).

### ***Unique Issues in Collecting Qualitative Data***

Collecting qualitative data differs significant from collecting quantitative data (or simply downloading a data set) in that the process requires a high level of interpersonal skills, creativity and the opportunities for accessing data may come with psychological/emotional stresses, dangers and limitations on particular researcher's opportunities. Qualitative researchers collect data directly from people, whether by observing them, interacting with them or talking with them. In this regard the qualitative researcher needs to be able to establish rapport with people, must present himself as someone who is at a minimum non-threatening, and ideally as someone with whom those being studied wish to spend time. The qualitative researcher also needs to be

able to modify his presentation of self on a moment's notice, and identify actions and means of interactions that are likely to be positive and productive with those being studied.

Relationships between researchers and those being studied can be a challenge to establish, maintain, and sometimes end. Initiating a relationship with people being studied requires that the researcher be able to relate with people in the field, and can interact on a recurring basis in ways that people in the field find pleasant and rewarding. One of the issues that few qualitative researchers address or think about at the outset of a project, however, is how to end relationships with those in the field. If the researcher is successful in initiating and maintaining positive and productive interpersonal relations with those being studied, it can be stressful (for both the researcher and those they study (see Tewksbury, 2006). These are issues that are non-issues for quantitative scholars; it takes little or no personality or skill to distribute a survey or download a dataset to one's computer. The qualitative researcher, then, must master the additional challenges of making "friends", managing relationships and gracefully exiting from research sites in order to be successful.

It is also important to recognize that while any person can do quantitative research on any topic, the personal statuses and traits of qualitative researchers can provide powerful barriers to successful completion of projects. Because interaction is required when collecting qualitative data, some researchers may have demographic, social or political traits that are defined as undesirable, deviant or otherwise overly negative and as a result those one desires to study may refuse to interact with the researcher. For example, studies of white supremacists would be extremely difficult to do for minority researchers. Women, the disabled and persons of either advanced or very young age may find some research sites difficult or impossible to access.

These are not issues that confront and confound quantitative researchers; only scholars who actually interact with their study's subjects need to manage these types of relationships and challenges.

Some research sites may also introduce physical dangers for researchers. Studies of active criminal offenders, drug-using subcultures and some political groups, for example, may be dangerous to the physical welfare and well-being of researchers. In other situations, dangers may arise while in research sites for researchers who are members of particular groups, based on issues such as gender, race, age, ethnicity, cultural background, political affiliation and other issues (see Sharp and Kremer, 2006). While this does not necessarily mean that such studies are impossible to do, the threats and dangers inherent in the research sites may lead some researchers to elect to not do some studies. Dangers can be managed (see Williams, Dunlap, Johnson and Hamid, 1992), although the efforts at managing danger so as to maximize protection can be so restrictive as to make project completion nearly impossible.

Because interaction is at the heart of the qualitative data collection effort, researchers need to rely on those they are studying to agree to give their time and interactions to the researcher. Another problem that is relevant for qualitative but not quantitative researchers is that when doing interviews and observations the researcher needs to rely on those being studied to show up, agree to talk with the researcher, stay for the duration of time required, and to participate in ways that are productive. When those being studied do not come through on these issues the data being collected may be limited or contaminated, meaning that a project is likely to be delayed in completion, or not completed.

The data that are produced in qualitative endeavors are almost always texts, narratives or visual images. Whereas both quantitative and qualitative methods seek to identify, explain and discuss patterns within and across data, the actual “things” and meaningful labels/expressions for such things about which patterns are the focus supply the actual data for qualitative analyses. Quantitative research requires that one either simply study the counts of events/people/things or that numeric labels be created for meaningful events, experiences and actions. Without numeric labels on “variables” the quantitative scholar is unable to manipulate data and identify patterns. For the quantitative scholar “meaning” is interchangeable with a mathematical value; for the qualitative researcher what the data truly mean is the centerpiece of investigations and analyses.

Some scholars call for applying technological advances to qualitative data sets, in large part for the purpose of “improving the reliability, validity and efficiency of field research” (Stolzenberg, 2002, p. xvii). However, what such a suggestion means is that qualitative research can (and in the eyes of some “should”) be subjected to the statistical analyses that define quantitative research products. This approach is essentially the attempt of quantitative scholars to co-opt qualitative data, transform it to impersonal statistics, and yet gain (some) of the insights and contributions that are unique to qualitative research.

### ***Types of questions to be addressed by qualitative research***

Qualitative research seeks to provide in-depth, detailed information which, although not necessarily widely generalizable, explores issues and their context, clarifying what, how, when, where and by and among whom behaviors and processes operate while describing in explicit detail the contours and dynamics of people, places, actions and interactions. At the core, qualitative research seeks to identify and explain patterns and themes in events and persons, and

across variously grounded events and persons. Similar to Weber's concept of *verstehen*, qualitative researchers seek to provide a fully rounded empathetic understanding of issues, concepts, processes and experiences.

Typically, the products of qualitative research are presentations of taxonomies, explanations of cultural settings, and the development of theoretical constructs and arguments. The specifics that are presented in qualitative research reports differ from the types of specifics that are found in reports of quantitative research. Whereas exact measurements and values indicating strengths of relationships are the centerpieces of statistical research, the focuses in qualitative reports are on making of arguments. These arguments are supported with examples, and explanations of how patterns and trends in the data are seen and experienced, not necessarily how they are measured.

Taxonomies, sometimes also called typologies, are presentations of types of a particular thing, person, event, etc. A taxonomy identifies a set number of categories that reflect the variety of forms that a particular event, etc. may take. Qualitative research identifies the various forms/categories and explains the characteristics that define that particular variation. Additionally, the categories will be explained so as to not only show what defines that particular form, but also how the various forms are differentiated from one another.

When qualitative research seeks to explain cultural settings the research is most often presented in the form of an ethnographic report. An ethnography is an explanation of how a setting or group of people operate, focusing on what is actually done and the contextual details of the actions. For many readers of ethnography the value is in having things explained in ways that reflect how we all perceive, experience, and make sense of the worlds we live in and know.

Just as an intelligent person can explain his or her own situation, giving a listener/reader a sense of what is going on and how aspects of one's world function in support of and in opposition to other aspects of our world, so too does the skilled qualitative research explain the worlds they study. To be able to provide readers with a mental picture and feel for the basic operations, flow and "feel" of a setting or group is the goal of one who writes ethnography.

Qualitative research is often critiqued by quantitative researchers as the form of research which provides initial theoretical constructs and tools for developing measurements (variables) that are used in statistical research to produce specifics about unique relationships among specified pieces (variables) of settings, groups and actions/interactions. Qualitative research is sometimes referred to as "exploratory" in the sense that it entails venturing into aspects of social structure and interaction that have not been previously adequately explored, and identifying the core elements of structure and interactions. The identification of these concepts and constructs, together with interpretation on the part of the researcher is the process of theoretical development. The qualitative researcher cannot "prove" that something exists in a particular way or that constructs and concepts relate in particular manners, but the qualitative researcher can (and does) propose and argue in support of particular manners of relations. These theorized concepts and relationships, then, are the core of theories for explaining the phenomena under study.

Qualitative research relies on the process of analytic descriptions for "identification of recurrent patterns or themes and attempting to construct a cohesive representation of the data. These recurrent themes are then linked to concerns or issues in the . . . literature – theoretical, conceptual, or applied – as you develop interpretations of what is happening in your setting (or

interviews or documents or images) and what their words or images mean to the participants” (Warren and Karner, 2005, p. 190) As such, the analytic process in qualitative research is centered on researchers looking at their data, finding patterns and similarities across cases, times and instances and interpreting what these issues mean.

Quantitative research, on the other hand, is focused on testing the strength and persistence of relationships between distinct measures. Specifying exactly how two (or more) very narrow, limited concepts/variables is of value, but often of value only for very exact measurements of narrowly defined issues, concepts and variables. As such, quantitative research relies on the ways that researchers choose to have variables defined, and what they elect to include within the scope of the definition of variables. This is not dissimilar to what qualitative research does. However, the important difference here is that the quantitative researcher needs to know the parameters of the variables being used before embarking on the study. Qualitative researchers explore the span and reach of concepts (e.g. variables) through the process of collecting and interpreting data. It is through the process of qualitative research that the definitions of concepts are identified and specified. Quantitative research assumes the researcher can and does define each and every variable in accurate and meaningful ways, outside of the context of the culture and setting of the behaviors, individuals and groups being studied. The qualitative researcher works from the assumption that concepts are contextually dependent; the quantitative researcher works from the assumption that s/he knows best what a concept means, and can pinpoint ways to measure such concepts.

It should additionally be acknowledged that it can be the case that quantitative research may complement qualitative research and benefit the production of knowledge. Pearce (2002)

argues that a research process which uses survey methods along with interviews and observation can be especially beneficial in developing theoretical concepts. When the researcher moves back and forth between each type of data, and draws on each to inform the process, specific questions and focus of the other, there can be significant advances made, providing for a much more well rounded understanding of a research topic or question.

***What qualitative research can tell us?***

The information learned from qualitative methods focuses on depth, rather than breadth. Qualitative data, whether collected from one on one interviews, observations, focus groups or immersion in a setting provides understandings of very specific individuals and settings, which while applicable beyond those specific settings and individuals, is limited in how widely generalizable such findings may be. But, overcoming this limitation is the value of learning about something deeply, and in a complete context. Quantitatively oriented researchers may utilize random samples and claim that their findings can be applied far and wide, but the degree to which their findings can be understood in complete context (e.g. taking in all aspects of their settings and locations) is limited by the variables which the researchers think to include (and for which they can get data). Qualitative research, instead, is collected in a naturalistic setting, and therefore brings with it the environment in which it is housed. As such, by definition and necessity qualitative research provides a more thorough (albeit less generalizable) understanding of how the collected data is impacted by, and reciprocally impacts upon, its context. In this way qualitative data allows, and in fact facilitates, understandings of experiences, perceptions and processes, in context and from the perspective of those being studied. As stated at the outset, qualitative research is about the essence and the ambience of things and experiences.

The focus of qualitative research is primarily on micro level issues. Quantitative research methods in the social sciences are broader, and often address issues at the macro societal level, where qualitative methods are impractical to use. However, with a focus on micro level issues (individuals, small groups, programs or organizations, single or a small number of similar cultural settings) qualitative research provides information that draws on a wide range of aspects of the person(s), group(s) or setting(s) to paint a picture of wholeness. Quantitative research, even when also focusing on micro-levels questions may draw on multiple aspects of what the researcher believes is important about the person(s), group(s) or setting(s), but does not paint a picture of how all facets of the focused upon entity come together. Rather, quantitative endeavors may point out and illuminate some connections and parts of the picture, but lacks the ability to know what colors, shapes and textures are necessary for painting a meaningful picture. Qualitative research, focusing on micro-level issues and concepts, because of how researchers look at issues and concepts does pull all of the necessary colors, shapes and textures – including shadings and uses of alternative brush strokes – into the painting. The results are starkly contrasting. The quantitatively informed painting may allow the viewer to know what the subject of the painting is, but areas of the canvas will be left blank, colors are unlikely to be correct (and maybe even misleading) and textures will be uniform and flat. The qualitatively informed painting, however, will be complete, have colors, shapes and textures blended and varied, and the painting will be nuanced and show depth.

Quantitative research fails to account for the full set of potentially influential factors that may be important for understanding how experiences are constructed, varieties of cases are similar and/or different or perceptions and views are constrained and facilitated. With quantitative research it is necessary for the researcher to identify the full range of potential

influences prior to conducting a study; if a variable is not included in the data from the very beginning stages of a project, it can never be known whether that issue in fact is important for experiences, processes or cultures. However, as a scientific method that allows, and relies on the emergence of a wide range of unanticipated influences, the risk of missing out on identifying what is important is minimized in qualitative research.

Via analogy, we can see that quantitative methods is the line dancing approach to science. Everyone and anyone can do it, and all that seems to matter is that you get the steps right. If you do the steps correctly, and in the right order, you will get a product. It might not be smooth, have good connections between the steps or look well executed, but so long as the steps are done mechanically correctly, it is presumed to be well executed. Qualitative research on the other hand is the ballet-like, interpretative dance approach to science. While there are steps to be done, it is more important to produce a smooth, well-connected, emotionally-infused product. Qualitative research does not rely on the mechanical precision of steps being performed, but instead focuses on how the overall product communicates a message and moves people both emotionally and intellectually. Qualitative research advances understandings, which means that qualitative research advances thinking, and theory. Quantitative research may be valuable for evaluating theory and testing whether theory holds up under a variety of circumstances and instances. But, it is qualitative research and understandings that provide scholars with the insights to conceptualize issues and problems differently, thereby providing the foundation and building blocks for theoretical advancements, refinements and even initiations. This point is even acknowledged and conceded by defenders of quantitative methods' superior status in criminology and criminal justice. As Worrall (2000: 358-359) admits, "In reality, theory construction is a largely qualitative endeavor. . . . Qualitative researchers primarily build and

advance theories.” In short, while quantitative methods certainly do offer some information and understandings about criminology and criminal justice, qualitative methods provide more, more in-depth and more meaningful understandings.

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