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A Guide to Research Methods in Environmental Justice Project Analysis by Jeffrey Alan Johnson: Debrief

Summary of Main Points

Johnson's article is basically a guide to research methods with brief inclusion of environmental justice issues. Instead of a review or research article it is meant to act as a guide for future research that can be applied to all types of projects, many of the sections Johnson details directly pertain to student's thesis research. For instance, the section discussing operationalizing is the first time I have heard this term, yet it seems very important to many graduate students needing to gather data and measure terms such as "geovisualize, success, era, decade, security, restoration, etc." Also, the discussion on the different types of variables such as nominal variables and ratio variables and their different strengths and weaknesses will be important to many thesis projects. Even further, the simple identification of different data including nominal, ordinal, and scalar data will be useful in making the appropriate data choices for our research. Johnson's clear writing and simple explanations of these and other sections dealing with data and methods are important to support a good thesis methods chapter. Overall this article will be a good reference when building methods and analysis sections of a thesis and applicable to most all types of research projects.

Summary of the Points made in the Discussion

The class thought the article was a good overall summary of quantitative methods but lacked depth in the qualitative methods section. One of the small flaws that were pointed out was the lack of detail Johnson used when talking about Excel; he did not include "Microsoft" or the year model. The

class agreed that Excel 2007 was much harder and more difficult to use than Excel 2003 so it would be beneficial to have a better description of that section including identifying exactly what year is being described.

Many students approached the article in terms of their own personal research. This resulted in asking themselves questions about what certain terms mean in their work and brought attention to how much time matters especially when interviewing and carrying out participant observation. Therefore, the sections on operationalization and temporal issues applied to everyone and seemed influential in perfecting our proposals.

Operationalization brought up other topics as well, such as realizing that worlds can change over time so it is important to have a historical understanding of certain worlds. In addition, it is important to create a common language in a discipline and/or identify the origin of the definition you choose to use. Also, the class talked about how it is important to realize that words, understandings, and concepts vary across disciplines. In order to work in interdisciplinary context you must be aware of the differences and therefore clear in your writing what disciplines you are using to define your work.

The group also talked about the different variables/data types Johnson discusses and identified the reality that whichever data/variables you choose can produce different results and make you look really good or really bad. Therefore, it is important to be aware of data types so you use the appropriate kinds with your methods.