

# QUALITATIVE & FIELD RESEARCH

# QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DATA

- **Quantitative Data:** Numerical data
  - That person has an IQ of 120.
  - Can be aggregated and compared more easily
  - Statistical analyses uses quantitative data
- **Qualitative Data:** Non-numerical data
  - That person is intelligent.
  - Richer in meaning and detail
  - Better explains intricate experiences
  - Aligns better with idiographic explanations

# WHAT IS QUALITATIVE RESEARCH?

- **Qualitative Methods:** non-quantitative accounts of small groups or individuals
  - Interested in how people describe/experience/interpret their lives
- **Features of qualitative research:**
  - Interprets the meaning people use to describe their own lives/actions
  - Treats behavior as part of a holistic social process dependent on context
  - Investigates social phenomena as it occur IRL not in a lab
  - Use non-representative, small samples to investigate question
  - Doesn't start out with a hypothesis – allows ideas & answers to emerge
- **Fieldwork:** the data collection phase of qualitative research
  - Out in the world observing, talking to, working with individuals to learn about their lives or related social phenomena

# TOPICS FOR FIELD RESEARCH

- Can develop deeper understanding and detailed perspective
- Topics that defy simplification and quantification
- Good for:
  - Determining attitudes and behaviors in their natural setting
  - Looking at social groups or processes *over time*
  - Investigating cultural practices or norms
  - Trying to understand social roles and relationships
  - Looking at groups and group behavior
  - Investigating specific places, settings
  - Examining certain lifestyles
  - Direct observation of life in context

# ROLE OF THE OBSERVER

- Must think about how you as a researcher are participating in lives of your subjects
  - Watching vs. asking vs. participating
- Is it ethical to deceive the people you are studying in the hope that they will confide in you in ways that they would not if they knew you were a researcher?
- **Reactivity:** If people know they are being studied they may change their behavior or attitude in some way.
- Must practice **Reflexivity:** Maintain self awareness, be critical of self, methods, data

# RELATIONSHIP TO PARTICIPANTS

- How do you relate to your participants?
  - Are you a researcher? A friend? A confidant?
- The Martian vs. The native
  - Observer vs. participant
  - Different roles will give you different perspective and data
- Do you remain “**objective**” or immerse yourself in the participants’ social world?
  - **Objectivity:** researchers can or should remain distanced from what they study so they do not sway findings with their own personal beliefs, values, and personalities
- *Emic* perspective: take point of view of participants (from the inside)
- *Etic* perspective: try to maintain distance (from the outside)
  - Can do both if you maintain **reflexivity**

# RELATIONSHIP TO PARTICIPANTS

- Should avoid “going native” and getting too involved
- **Must maintain and practice Reflexivity**
  - The practice of being self aware of our how our own beliefs, values, personal histories, judgments, and biases may influence research
  - Must be self-critical when deciding on methods
  - Must be self-aware throughout the research process, data analysis, and reporting of findings
- **Ask:**
  - Is this what I am finding or do I want to see this pattern?
  - Is there strong evidence in my data of this pattern?
  - How much is my data shaped by my involvement and participation?

# QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PARADIGMS

- **What is a paradigm?**
  - **Paradigm: a model or framework for observation and understanding that shapes what we see and how we understand it**
  - **AKA: ways to do qualitative research**
- **Paradigms in Qualitative Research**
  - **Naturalism & Ethnography**
  - **Ethnomethodology**
  - **Grounded Theory**
  - **Case Studies**
  - **Institutional Ethnography**
  - **Participatory Action Research\***



# CASE STUDIES

- Case studies: in-depth examinations of a single instance of a social phenomenon (i.e. a neighborhood, family, gang)
  - Case studies are descriptive – attempting to describe what is happening
  - Attempt to develop a deeper understanding of social phenomena
- Extended Case study is used to discover flaws in and then modifying existing social theory
  - Different from regular case study because try to “lay out as coherently as possible what we expect to find in our site *before* entry

# NATURALISM & ETHNOGRAPHY

- Social reality is “out there” and needs to be observed
  - Assumes that an *objective social reality exists* and can be studied
- Method type: **Ethnography**
  - Detailed and accurate descriptions (*not explanations*) of social life
- Good for:
  - Conducting research on a group of people/culture/place
- Conducting an ethnography entails:
  - Gaining access to a community through key informants
  - Making *observations* and drawing connections
  - Attempts to describe social relations & inner workings of community
  - Telling “’their’ stories the way they really are”

# ETHNOMETHODOLOGY

- Ethnomethodology focuses on the discovery of *implicit, unspoken assumptions and agreements*
  - Researcher must “make sense” out of their informants perspective of the world
- Method involves the intentional breaking of agreements as a way of revealing their existence
  - Challenge rules of conversation/community to prove they exist
  - “What do you mean?” “What would happen if I...?”
  - Focus on underlying patterns, social rules that regulate everyday life
- Does not focus on only individuals – focuses on the **social rules that govern behavior and interaction**

# INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY

- Started by Dorothy Smith (1978) to better understand women's everyday experiences by discovering the power relations that shape their experiences
- Examine personal experiences of individuals to reveal the power relationships present in the institutions
  - By asking how things work, a research can discover rules that govern experiences
- Like Ethnomethodology, this technique does not focus on individuals
  - Focuses on personal experiences to uncover institutional power structures that guide and control behavior and interaction

# PAR

## ■ PAR: Participatory Action Research

- Takes a different approach to research by putting participants in control
- Researcher typically works with disadvantaged groups to give them a voice to improve social conditions
  
- Researcher finds group of individuals interested in similar topics and they design the research project together
  - Intended to counter the implicit idea that researchers are superior to the people they study
  - Including survey design, questions, methods choices
  
- All participants have control over the purpose and procedures of the research

# GROUNDED THEORY

- Attempts to derive theories from an analysis of the patterns, themes, and common categories discovered in observational or interview data
  - Can conduct observational or interview research to learn about social life and relationships
- Grounded theory guidelines:
  - Compare numerous social incidents
  - Obtain multiple viewpoints, various participants
  - Analyze data as you collect it – look for patterns and investigate
  - Be skeptical – test your interpretation and understanding
  - Follow research procedures: systematically organize and code data



# QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWING

- Asking questions & getting answers from participants
  - Conversational, open-ended, in-depth data gathering
  - Better understanding of the participant
- Types of Qualitative Interviews
  - **Structured**
    - Ask questions in order, strictly follow protocol
  - **Semi-structured (or Unstructured)**
    - Use list of questions and main research question to guide the interview
  - **Focus Groups**
    - Gather group of participants to discuss topic and answer questions
- **\*Need a strong Interview Protocol**



# STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

## ■ Structured Interviews

- Appropriate when trying to get an overview of research population
  - Behaviors, attitudes, values of certain group
- Good if researcher is trying to quantify data at later point
- Can range from survey interview to lists of descriptive/narrative questions





# SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

## ■ Semi-structured or Unstructured Interviews

- Good when doing exploratory and descriptive research
- Good if trying to learn more about a topic, uncover nuances
- Help researcher understand a participant's unique experience
- Effective strategy if memory failure or participant resistance occurs
- Gives **participant control over the pace and direction of interview**
  - They can determine depth topics are discussed, maintain comfort level



# FOCUS GROUPS

- Guided group discussion of 6-12 people focused on a concern, issue, program, event, shared life experience
- Social interaction between group members can produce an insightful exchange of information
  - Gives researcher insight into *what* people think about a topic and *why* they think they way they do
- Used often for: market research, political analysis, evaluation research



# STEPS FOR CONDUCTING A QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW

## 1. Thematizing

- Pick a topic, define a main research question

## 2. Designing

- Create IRB application, interview protocol, materials for recruitment

## 3. Interviewing

- Conduct the interview

## 4. Transcribing

- Create a written text of the interview

## 5. Analyzing

- Read through data, determine the meaning of responses, look for answers to your research questions

## 6. Verifying & Reporting

- Determine what you have found in you data, work with other researchers to confirm; Write up your findings to share

# DESIGNING AN INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

- Choose a Topic and determine your Research Question(s)
- Design a Protocol AKA an Interview guide
  - Pre and Post-interview instructions, language, material for recruitment
- Create a Question guide
  - Closed and open-ended questions
  - Descriptive and Narrative questions
- What are 5 important aspects of the Pre- & Post-interview protocol?

# DESIGNING AN INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

## Pre-Interview

1. Questions
2. Explanation
3. Recording?
4. Duration
5. Nature of question
6. Voluntary Participation
7. Benefits
8. Confidentiality
9. Data information
10. Contact info

## Post Interview

1. Questions
2. Gratitude
3. Contact info
4. \*Confidentiality

What about the questions...?

# CREATING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- What is a good question?
- Ask yourself: **What do I want to know?**
- **2 types of questions**
  - **Descriptive** – asks for a specific answer, more narrow, participant give information that researcher asked for
  - **Narrative** – asks for more open-ended answer, participant can decide what to talk about
- **Type of interview**
- **2 questions (type and the question)**

# THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND...

- Familiarity with topic and questions
- Appearance/Presentation and Demeanor
- Engaging and using your social skills
- Creating a safe and comfortable interview environment
- Listening and Responding



# PRESENTATION & DEMEANOR

- Presentation should match that of the people you will be interviewing
- Follow social norms, cues, and standards
- Interviewer should be pleasant, open-minded, relaxed, friendly
- Try to determine the type of person the participant would like to be talking to
  - Do they need lots/little engagement? Follow-up questions?



# BUILDING RAPPORT

- An interview is a personal exchange of information
- Engage and be aware of using social skills
- Try to establish “social harmony” aka “good rapport”
- Try to put participants at ease, make them feel like they are talking to a friend
- Researcher should attempt to create a comfortable and conversational environment
  - Not TOO conversational – it’s still an interview with *a purpose*
  - Do not lose sight of the goal of interview
  - Use Interview protocol and question guide to stay in track

# LISTENING AND RESPONDING

- Is the researcher a passive observer during an interview? **NO!!!**
- 
- Engage in **Active Listening**
  - Let them know you are listening: nodding, “okay”, “Mhmm” “yeah”
- Be a **Verbal Mirror: repeat back what they say to you**
  - “So if I am understanding you...”
  - “So what I am hearing is...”
  - Provides the participant to clarify or say more about the topic
- Use verbal probes to get more info AKA **follow-up questions**
  - “Can you tell me more about that?” “So what happened?”
  - “What did you think of that?”
  - “What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?”
  - **Be interested!**

# OBSERVING DURING THE INTERVIEW

- Take notes before and after interview to
  - Keep track of your own thoughts
  - Remember specifics that will not be obvious in a recording
- During the interview you can take brief notes on:
  - Topics to cover
  - Questions to ask
  - Thoughts about participant's response, presentation, demeanor

