Qualitative Methods

An Introduction
What is social research?

Social research is the scientific study of society. Social research looks at the attitudes, assumptions, beliefs, trends, stratifications and rules of a society.
Qualitative Research

- ‘Qualitative Research...involves finding out what people think, and how they feel - or at any rate, what they say they think and how they say they feel. This kind of information is subjective. It involves feelings and impressions, rather than numbers’

- Bernhardt and Goldstucker
Why Qualitative

- To explore new social events that we don’t know very much about or can’t get quantitative data about.
- This work is intended to develop theories from the world we can observe.
- When we want to understand what other people think about their society, traditions or world.
- Make observations about things that can be measured, only as patterns to be noticed.
Interconnections

• Qualitative and Quantitative research work together.
• In order to best understand a social phenomena, studies using both methods are essential.
Positivist Paradigm

• Emphasises that human reason is supreme and that there is a single objective truth that can be discovered by science
• Encourages us to stress the function of objects, and to regard the world as a rational, ordered place with a clearly defined past, present and future
Elements of the Research Process

**Deductive** thinking (Quantitative)

THEORY

HYPOTHESIS

OBSERVATION

CONFIRMATION
Non-Positivist Paradigm

- Questions the assumptions of the positivist paradigm
- Argues that our society places too much emphasis on rationality and not enough on logical connections
- Argues that this ordered, rational view of people denies the complexity of the social and cultural world we live in
- Stresses the importance of symbolic, subjective experience
Inductive thinking (Qualitative)

- Observation
- Patterns
- Hypothesis
- Theory
Qualitative Methods

What skills do I need?

- Must have requisite knowledge and skills about methodology, setting and nature of the issue.
- Must be familiar with own biases, assumptions, expectations, and values.
- Must be empathic, intelligent, energetic, and interested in listening.
- Must be open to embracing multiple realities.
- Must be prepared to produce detailed, comprehensive, and sometimes lengthy reports.

Source: (Kuh & Andreas, 1991)
Subjectivity vs. Bias

- **Subjectivity**: understanding a phenomenon from the point of view of the participants and/or its particular social and institutional context

- **Bias**: prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair.
Data

Collecting Data:

- Observation and participant observation
- Interviewing
- Focus Groups
- Cultural Products
Qualitative Methods: Getting Started

- Choose a Topic

- Choose your unit of analysis.
  - Individuals
    - Certain experiences
    - Experiences in particular settings
    - Identities such as student with disabilities, ex-con
  - Groups
    - Demographic groups
    - Intervention groups
    - Types of people such as ball players, secretaries
    - Those in one setting versus another
    - Organizations
Qualitative Methods: Research Question

Qualitative research *quickly* exhausts resources and time.

So...

It's important limit the amount of data collected.

*It’s not the size that matters, it’s what you do with the data.*

- Be very clear about the **research focus** and develop a comprehensive research question.
  - Write down your foggy ideas and then get more specific.
    - Concentrate on most important issues and not others.
      - Start writing specific questions you want to answer.
      - Now get even more specific...what do you want to understand?