

Finish up with the chapter on Qualitative Research  
& then brief review for final exam

## Kinds of Qualitative Research

1. Qualitative interviewing
2. Focus groups
  - a gathering of deliberately selected people who participate in a planned discussion
3. Ethnography/participant observation
  - the very detailed description of the customs of individual peoples and cultures
4. Challenges of Qualitative research...

# 1. Qualitative Interviewing

## **Questions:**

- Quite general, esp. early in the research
- Not theory and hypotheses driven
  - Search for ***thick data*** instead (detailed description)
- The topics explored and Q's asked often change as the study progresses

## Qualitative Interviewing

### Types of Interviews

- ***Semi-structured***
  - Have a simple, changeable interview schedule
  - Usually called an ***interview guide*** in this context
- ***Unstructured***
  - Have little or no interview schedule
- ***Life History approach***
  - Here we supplement comprehensive unstructured "interviews" with:
  - personal documents/photos/diaries/ etc.
  - Usually ***retrospective***
  - Ex. Oscar Lewis, 1961, the Sanchez family in Mexico city
  - Goal: Builds the story of one person or one family over the course of their lives

## Quantitative vs. Qualitative Interviewing

| <u>Survey (Structured) Interviews</u>  | <u>Qualitative Interviews</u>  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standardized <i>interview schedule</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questions and question order standardized for all</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Clear beginning/end</li> <li>• Often <i>closed-ended</i></li> <li>• Interviewer remains neutral / objective</li> <li>• Professional tone/no jokes, anecdotes etc.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unstructured <i>interview guide</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questions and order often tailored to respondent</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Beginning/ end not clear           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• interview can be continued later</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <i>Open-ended</i>, with many probes</li> <li>• Interviewer shows personal interest           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More like a simple conversation</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Often informal, with diversions etc.</li> </ul> |

## 2. Focus groups

- In-depth group interviews
  - 6-10 participants usually considered optimum
  - Usually meet on one occasion
  - usually recorded
  - work with a *specific issue*
- Discussion controlled by a *skilled moderator*
  - success heavily dependent on his/her skills
  - make sure everyone participates
  - exploit group dynamics to obtain conflicting view points
- collects a lot of information quickly
  - Possibly too much
- potential problems:
  - dominant/shy personalities
  - Note: Be careful in terms of how you structure your focus group (provide appropriate guidance)
    - What type of information are you seeking to obtain?
  - E.g.
  - Obtaining information on “consumer preferences”
  - <http://johnnyholland.org/2009/06/the-danger-of-doing-the-research-wrong/>

### 3. Participant observation/ethnography

- **Ethnography** is the more inclusive term
  - **Participant observation** refers to the observational component of this sort of work
    - Not all ethnography includes participation
  - researcher is immersed in a particular social setting for a long period of time, sometimes even years
    - Behaviour is observed in an unstructured way
    - In-depth, unstructured discussions and interviews usually accompany observation
- Exs.
  - Foster's research on crime in a housing complex in Britain
  - Hothschild's research on emotional labour among stewardesses
- N.B. Ethnography can be contrasted with structured observation and much discussion here mirrors discussion from chapter 6

### Active or Passive?

- Sometimes an **active role** is necessary
  - Doing what your subjects are doing
  - Even when role is more observer and less participant
    - Maintain credibility in the minds of the people studied
    - Sometimes just happens - comes with the territory
- Sometimes an active role is physically dangerous, illegal or has ethical implications
  - Requires that limits are placed on level of activity
- Potential for **going native**
  - When you genuinely join the subjects (group, community) you are studying
  - Can happen
    - Ex. White's street corner society
      - He married into and stayed in community

## Access

- **Open settings**
  - public settings
    - public parks, downtown sidewalks, cafes etc. (easiest to get ethics approval)
- **Closed settings**
  - private or restricted settings:
    - meetings of private clubs, social movement organizational centres, private business offices, some schools etc.
- **Overt observation**
  - the people being studied know they are being observed by a researcher (again, easier to get ethics approval)
- **Covert observation**
  - the people being studied do not know they are being observed by a researcher

## Access

How do you access closed settings or gain entrance as a covert observer?

- You probably need a **sponsor**
  - Someone in the group/organization who can vouch for you
    - Sometimes very difficult to find one
    - Use friends, previous contacts, and colleagues if possible
  - Sponsors can also serve as **key informants**
    - persons who are particularly knowledgeable and cooperative
      - Drawbacks to using them:
        - Researcher may ignore other group members
        - Key informant's view may not be representative of the group as a whole
  - Even if you have a sponsor, you may need the approval of **gatekeepers**
    - Ex. social worker who runs a group home of troubled youth, have the power to deny contact, or to decide the nature of contact
    - Warden in a prison, etc.

## Ethnographic Data?

- Incredible amount of note taking and arranging takes place
  - **Mental notes**
    - memory, when not possible to write anything down
    - Ex. during covert observation
  - **Jotted notes**
    - written on the fly in the field
    - temporary reminders of what's happening as it unfolds (keywords, little phrases; quotes)
  - **Direct observation notes**
    - recorded immediately
    - chronologically ordered by date, time, and place for each entry
  - **Analytic memos**
    - insights and inferences
    - notes on how to proceed
    - typically involves theoretical insights
  - **Personal notes**
    - For purposes of reflexivity
      - Feelings and emotional reactions to research etc.

## Critiques of Qualitative Research

- Very impressionistic and subjective
  - choice of sample, questions or observations, and 'findings'
- Very 'interpretive'
  - Interpretations of selective observations
- Bias can result from personal relationships that develop during the research
- Problems of generalization (remember, non-probability samples)
  - However, generalization may not be the goal of the research
- Lack of transparency
  - Often difficult to determine *how* the research was conducted – why certain choices were made, and the exact characteristics of those choices
    - Who was sampled and why, what questions were asked, what the context of the interview/observations were etc.
- Difficult to replicate

## Qualitative Data

- Data management and interpretation is very labour intensive!
  - Most methods produce huge amounts of data at a time
    - Ex. How many words/ideas produced in a two hour interview?
  - Usually data is ***unstructured***
  - Often collected using multiple methods
    - Ex. Field notes from ethnography and transcripts from interviews
  - Often data is from multiple media
    - Creating tape recordings, photographs and videos as part of the process

## Qualitative Data

- Unless project is very small or very simple:
  - Very unwieldy! Makes data difficult to organize, archive, access etc.
- Like with quantitative data, much software available to help
  - Ex. Nvivo, Nud\*ist, Atlas-ti
    - Nvivo as an example:
      - <http://www.qsrinternational.com/what-is-qualitative-research.aspx>

- Final Exam (3 hours)
- Tuesday, December 18<sup>th</sup>, 7:00 p.m.
- LH 103
  
- **Chapters 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13 & lectures**
  
- Part A: 60 multiple choice questions based on lectures/chapter readings (40% of final)
  
- Part B: Listing of about 40 terms (20%). 10 definitions will be provided, and you must indicate the appropriate term from the list.
  
- Part C will list 6 questions. You must answer 4 in as much detail as possible (40%)