



Qualitative Research Methods

When is using qualitative methods appropriate?

- Your method and research question must be compatible
- Should we use qualitative or quantitative methods to answer these research questions:
 - When parents receive a cash transfer, how much do they spend on their children, and what types of expenditures do they prioritize?
 - How do recipients view the EITC; how do they allocate these funds; and what meanings they attach to this money?
 - What, if any, are the coping strategies families adopt to mitigate economic risk in their allocations of their tax refunds?

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- What research questions can we answer well using qualitative methods?
 - With a few people around you, choose a topic area.
 - Spend ten minutes brainstorming to come up with an example of:
 - a research question that would best be answered quantitatively, and
 - one that would best be answered qualitatively

Mixed Income Housing

- How do rates of civic engagement among low-income parents in mixed-income housing developments compare to those in public and private housing?
- What role do public spaces in mixed-income housing units play in shaping residents' interactions? What do these interactions mean to residents?

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- What were some of the challenges of coming up with a good qualitative question?

Words of Wisdom

- o “Methodologically I was [clear]; I wanted to provide a rich description of social reality. The problem was that my romance with ethnomethodology didn’t help me frame my research question in a way that would allow an answer that made a theoretical contribution. I was asking, ‘*How* does social class influence children’s schooling?’ ... What I lacked was another, more conceptual, question: ‘Do these data support one interpretation and suggest that another interpretation is not as useful?’ or to be more specific, ‘Can we understand parents’ involvement in schooling as being linked to their values? Does cultural capital provide a better explanation for why parents are involved in school?’ ... By framing a ‘how’ question I could not provide a similarly defensible answer. I could not show that one explanation was superior; I could not demonstrate that these data helped to address an important issue. In short, I could not answer the ‘**So what?**’ question.” – Annette Lareau (1996)

Methods Components of a Qualitative Dissertation Proposal



Qualitative Methods Components

Interview-based studies

- Sampling technique and sample size
- Preliminary interview guide
- Recording & transcribing interviews
- Data storage & management
- Data analysis plan

Justify
your
choices



Ethnographies

- Site choice
- Site access
- Field notes
- Data storage & management
- Data analysis plan



Other Considerations

- Time to negotiate site/sample access
- Time for IRB approval
 - Often more challenging with vulnerable populations
 - Include provisions that allow you to recontact respondents
- Logistics of conducting fieldwork
 - Practicing interviewing skills
 - Refining interview guide
 - Finding respondents
 - Transportation
 - Scheduling
 - Compensation for respondents
- Time to transcribe and code
- Writing memos as you go

Other Resources

- Methods appendices of good qualitative books
 - Pay attention to differences in resources (e.g., research team versus individual; time in the field)
 - Sandra Smith's *Lone Pursuit*
 - Jennifer Silva's *Coming Up Short*
 - Stefanie DeLuca et al.'s *Coming of Age in the Other America*
 - Kathy Edin & Maria Kefalas' *Promises I Can Keep*
- Lareau & Shultz. (1996). Journeys through Ethnography: Realistic Accounts of Fieldwork.

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- o “As I bumped about in the field not knowing what I was doing I often felt—incorrectly, as it turned out— that I was making a terrible mess of things, that my project was doomed, and that I should give up the enterprise immediately. This negativism came from my persistent feeling that, despite my having a research question when I started, I didn’ t truly know what I was doing there. In part, my gloom signaled the continuing struggle to clarify the intellectual goals of the project.”
- o “As I have discovered, using qualitative methods means learning to live with uncertainty, ambiguity, and confusion, sometimes for weeks at a time. It also means carving a path by making many decisions, with only the vaguest guideposts and no one to give you gold stars and good grades along the way.” – Annette Lareau (1996)