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LEC 04 - Research Methods

Why do Research?

- We do research on the social world to capture the experiences of the people in it

Types of Research:

Quantitative: A methodological approach that relies on numerical data. This approach seeks to determine causal relationships and correlations between variables.
- Usually presented in figures, graphs, and tables
- Uses variables and numerical data
- Good for large scale trends

Qualitative: A methodological approach where researchers seek to develop in-depth understandings of social phenomena and interpret meanings of social actors through the collection of non-numerical data.
- Uses words to describe the data
- Exemplifies patterns
- Good for lots of depth of understanding

- Qualitative research projects are oriented towards an understanding related to the research topic rather than establishing patterns
  - Will have implications for research questions, how you sample, whether you articulate variables and a hypothesis, the conclusions you draw, etc.

Example:

Is social class a factor in who attends university after graduating high school?

What kind of qualitative data could you collect to answer this research question?

- Words of participants
- Interviews with people in different neighborhoods

What kind of quantitative data could you collect to answer this research question?

- Poll statistics
- Information about income level vs how many people go to university

Sampling:

Population: The entire set of items, events, units, or people about which the researcher has a research interest

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Sample: A subset of the population of interest that is selected to be apart of research

Probability Sampling:

- Mathematically random
- Typically aim for a representative sample
- Better for establishing generalizability of findings
- Equal likelihood of someone being selected

Non-Probability Sampling:

- Not random
- A purpose tied to your research topic guides the selection of a sample
- Not generalizable

Variables:

Variable: The measure of a concept that can change
- Educational attainment (highest degree earned)
- GPA
- Religious affiliation
- Type of crime

Independent Variable: The variable that causes change in the dependent variable

Dependant Variable: The variable that changes after a change in the independent variable

Example: The amount of rainfall directly affects the height of grass
- The amount of rainfall is the independent variable (X on a graph)
- The height of grass is the dependant variable (Y on a graph)

Methods:

Covered in textbook:
- Surveys and questionnaires
- Interviews and focus groups
- Field research
- Official statistics
- Experimental design

Other sociological methods:
- Content analysis
- Historical-comparative
- Ethnography
- Net-nography
- Secondary analysis
- Visual methods

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- Time-use diaries
- Social network analysis