Great. Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Erin Farley and I'm one of JRSA's research associates. For those of you who are less familiar with JRSA, it stands for Justice, Research, and Statistics Association. We are a national non-profit organization dedicated to the use of research and analysis to inform criminal and juvenile justice decision-making, and we are comprised of a network of researchers and practitioners, which at the core include directors and staff from state's fiscal analysis centers.

Before I go any further, I wanted to take a moment to thank our partners at the Bureau of Justice Statistics for helping to make this webinar possible. With that, I'd like to welcome you all to our webinar on Qualitative Research Methods for Policy, Practice, and Research, and this presented by Dr. Kendall Cotton Bronk. Dr. Bronk is an associate professor of psychology in the division of behavioral and social sciences. She is at ... I'm sorry, I'm jumping a little bit. At Claremont Graduate University, and she is a developmental scientist interested in understanding and supporting the positive development and moral growth of young people.

Dr. Bronk has helped define and outline the perimeters of the exemplar methodology, a primarily qualitative approach to empirical research that provides insight into exemplary or high-developed forms of growth. Dr. Bronk teaches masters and doctoral classes in child development, adolescent development, and qualitative research methods.

So I want to take a moment to welcome Dr. Bronk, and I will pass the magic ball over to you so that you can take control of the slides. Welcome.

Are we underway?

Yep.

Alright. Thanks, Erin, and thank you to the Justice, Research, and Statistics Association for having me here today. So as Erin noted, yes, I teach at Claremont Graduate University and I wanted to point out at Claremont Graduate University I teach semester-long courses on qualitative research method. That's all to say there's an awful lot to cover here. This is a pretty broad topic, and it wouldn't really be possible to cover everything in qualitative research methods in just a one hour session, so since I understand that most of you online today have really deep experience in quantitative research methods but maybe not as much experience using qualitative research methods, my plan is to touch on some of the most important methods of qualitative research methods.

In short, this is really meant to be an introduction to some of the guiding principles of qualitative inquiry, not necessarily a comprehensive overview of it, so I hope that works with you.
Kendall Cotton Bronk: I'll plan to discuss these six topics that we have listed here, really as a means for sort of wetting your appetite for qualitative research methods and helping you get started thinking about how and when and why you might want to use qualitative research. Since this single hour-long lecture is probably not gonna prepare you to go off to launch an extensive study on qualitative study all on your own, I do plan to wrap up with a list of my favorite qualitative research blogs, and so I think this will be some really great resources to you if you do want to do this kind of work in the future.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: Alright, so let's get started. I love this graphic because it reminds us that qualitative methods are very different than quantitative methods. In fact, many of the very foundational assumptions of quantitative research are actually sort of flipped on their heads in qualitative research. So let's start with a discussion of some of the assumptions that undergird qualitative research methods.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: So qualitative and quantitative research methods have actually completely different philosophical foundations. I'm not gonna go into those here because I really want to focus more on the applied side of things, but suffice it to say that the philosophical foundations of these two approaches are quite different, and those lead to different assumptions, which I will talk a little bit here. Whereas quantitative researches generally assume there is one objective reality that they want to get at, that they want to understand through their work, qualitative researches, on the other hand, assume there are multiple realities. Individuals experience the criminal justice system quite different based on their age, their ethnicity, their individual characteristics, and as a result they have different realities, different ways of making sense of their experience in the criminal or juvenile justice system, and the goal for qualitative research is to really understand and explore those multiple subjective realities.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: So this means that really, we want to ... we see the participants in qualitative research as our experts. They're the ones who have the perspective that we're trying to grasp. If we could, we would really want to sort of crawl inside their heads and see the world through their eyes as a way of really understanding how it is that they experience some particular event. Since we can't crawl inside their heads, the next best thing is that we end up working very closely with our study participants. We observe them. We read the things they write. We interview them. Whatever we can do to really get the best picture of how it is that they're experiencing or understanding or making sense of some particular event or experience that we're interested in.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: So this is really the ... this idea of multiple socially-constructed realities underlies really all the primary characteristics of qualitative inquiry. With that in mind, let's talk a little bit about some of these characteristics of qualitative work.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: First and perhaps most importantly, as we just discussed, the primary aim of most qualitative research is to really understand reality from the participant's perspective. How do these individuals make sense of this particular
phenomena? How do they understand it? How do they experience it? And one of the unique things about qualitative research is that we're able to get really rich and detailed descriptions of these experiences.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: We also get a really good picture of the whole person and the context in which they're sort of functioning. Sometimes the more statistical work can get a little more reductionistic where we're looking at one particular aspect, but in qualitative we're really looking at sort of the whole person, in context, and trying to get a really good understanding in a rich and detailed way of how they make sense of the broader world.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: One of the second sort of key characteristics of qualitative research is that the findings are specific to particular individuals in a particular place and at a particular time, so what that means is that you may not find the exact same thing if you interviewed or observed different individuals, even if they're in the same group. You might not even find the same thing if you interviewed the same individual but at different places or at different times in their lives, because of course their vision of how they're making sense of reality is going to change as their location changes, as their circumstances change, and certainly by individuals.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: So because we recognize that time and that place, they really matter, we typically conduct qualitative research in naturalistic settings, so for example we would rather conduct research, you know if we're interviewing, at a participant's place of work or at their school or at their home. We really want to try to go to our participants and find them where they are rather than pulling them out of their context and bringing them to us, because we know that if they do they're likely to be sharing different information with us, information that may not be as relevant to the context where they function on a regular basis, and of course we're looking for that kind of information.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: A third unique characteristic of qualitative inquiry is the role of the researcher. So the researcher in qualitative work is really a key data collection instrument. Now, in quantitative research the researchers often remain largely behind the scenes. You could mail out surveys and analyze the results without ever really encountering a participant, but this is definitely not the case with qualitative inquiry. In qualitative research, the researchers work really closely with the participant. Like I said, we think about participants as sort of the experts and we're trying to understand their view on matters, so in some cases we even think about our participants as co-investigators. They really have the information that we're trying to get. So like I said, we need to do this. We need to work closely with the participants in order to understand how they make sense of different events and experiences.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: Because of this close working relationship it's important for qualitative researchers to really consider the biases or the assumptions or the beliefs that they bring with them into the research process. In qualitative research, we don't
always consider the experiences that you bring with you ... they're not always a bad thing. In fact, sometimes these experiences give you insight that you wouldn't otherwise have, so if you have firsthand knowledge of something that your participants are going through you might ask questions that someone without this firsthand knowledge wouldn't ask, and that's a good thing.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: On the other hand, having too much of a perspective can be problematic, especially if we have an idea of how we expect things to play out. So we have this thing, natural confirmation bias. People have a natural confirmation bias, and this means we tend to seek out information that confirms our preconceived ideas and ignore information that doesn't. So this is gonna be very problematic if our goal is to really understand something from the perspective of our participants, and we have a strong idea of what that should look like.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: So we do have to be really careful about these assumptions that we bring to qualitative research. We want to use them to open our minds up to new possibilities, to the right questions to ask, and all of that, but we also need to be able to bracket those assumptions so that we can really hear what our participants are telling us.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: And so there are some strategies that qualitative researchers use to sort of bracket their own assumptions or biases when they're conducting research. One of those is to just take some time to reflect on these assumptions. You can think deeply about them, write about them, talk about them, but the idea ... and in fact, researchers often do all three of those, 'cause the idea is just really make yourself aware of them. Sometimes we come to conduct research and we're not even aware that we have this assumption or this expectation or this bias, but if we really sit down and take time to write about, talk about it, think about it, we can make ourselves aware of those biases and that can help us set them aside as we embark on the research project.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: Another thing that researchers will often do is make an effort to consider ... excuse me, to recruit someone who doesn't share that bias or who maybe has a different set of assumptions. Having a collaborator can help you consider alternative explanations and keep those assumptions in check.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: And then a third approach to helping you bracket your assumptions when you are starting a research project is to actually share some of your findings with your participants. Now, this isn't always desirable or even always feasible. You need to sort of figure out if this is a strategy that you can utilize or not, but we call these member checks and they can be a really effective way of keeping our biases and assumptions in check, and as ensuring that what we're learning or what we think we're learning is really a genuine reflection of the way that our participants experience the world.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: Okay, so the next characteristic of qualitative inquiry that I think is really core is the idea that qualitative work typically makes use of multiple data sources. So
this may mean that you collect multiple forms of data; for instance, maybe interviews, observations, and a review of written documents, or it may mean that you collect data from multiple informants, so for instance you might interview not only newly incarcerated individuals but also maybe their lawyers or family members or anyone else who’s likely to be able to shed light on these newly incarcerated individuals, their experience, or whatever the topic is that you’re investigating.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: The last characteristic of qualitative work has to do with the study design. So whereas quantitative studies have really highly prescribed study design, so they’re set out before the study begins, study designs in qualitative investigations, they can change. Qualitative studies tend to be more exploratory in nature, so you may not know exactly how things are going to go or how much information participants are going to be able to provide until you’re already in the field and underway, and as a result qualitative researchers can, and often do, change their sample or their data sources or alter their data collection tools throughout the course of the study. So this is a big switch from quantitative research design.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: So keep in mind that qualitative inquiry is a form of research that does not have many hard and fast rules. Instead, there are strategies and guidelines that researchers can use to achieve their different aims. In my experience in teaching this class, some people find this very frustrating. They really just want to know what's step one, what's step two, what can I do and what can't I do? And sure, there are some rules in qualitative research, but generally there are more guidelines. You know, here’s what you want to consider if this is your goal; on the other hand, you might consider this if this is your goal.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: So as we go through the rest of the talk today, you’ll see I’m really talking more about guidelines than hard and fast rules, but actually before I get into discussion of the qualitative research process, I just want to say something briefly about ethical considerations.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: So because the researcher is so close to the data collection process and working so closely with the participant, there tend to be some special ethical considerations that can arise in qualitative research methods. Some of these issues are gonna vary depending on what you’re using the research for. Is it something you’re gonna publish? Is this more of internal information? So some of this information may vary, but in general before you begin your study it’s always really important to consider some form of informed consent. When we do research through the university we have to get permission through our institutional review board, and I know that other organizations have institutional review boards as well so if this is relevant than you would definitely want to consider an institutional review board.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: But regardless of whether or not you have IRB, you really do want to have informed consent in a qualitative study, and what that means is that you need
to explain to your participants what your study is about, what their rights are as a participant, and how you're gonna use the data and how you're gonna protect their data, and it's important for them to know that their participation is voluntary. Obviously, if you're working with youth you need to get permission from parents.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: One of the things that we find in qualitative research is there's definitely a power differential. The person asking the questions is often the person who has more power than the person answering the questions, and people may not want to give us all of the information we're seeking, and my recommendation is always to be very cautious in pushing people to avoid doing so, and I think particularly given the nature of the work that many of you do, it's just really important to keep in mind that you need to be sensitive to vulnerable populations and the people in positions of power. So I think it's a good thing to keep in mind.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: If relevant, if you're going to be conducting observations, you would definitely need to get permission from the site, whatever site that is, wherever it is that you're conducting your observations, and then during the data collection and analysis process, or as a general rule, you're gonna want to avoid deceiving participants. Obviously in ... I don't know if this is something that is as relevant for the work that you are doing, but in general psych studies we have lots of participant deception and it really doesn't work well in qualitative studies because you're just working too closely with the participant. They're likely to figure out pretty quickly what you're doing, what kind [inaudible 00:18:25] information you're after, so it's generally best to just let them know upfront, be transparent about your goals and about your aim.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: When you're in that field, you may witness unethical or even illegal acts, and this happens in qualitative research and again, given the topic that you guys are working with, seems like something that could be an issue. As qualitative researchers, it's generally recommended that you really set out a plan, before you go into the field. You know, how are you gonna handle this if you witness something? What would you report and to whom would you report it? So important to have those conversations before you start.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: And then after the data collection is complete and you're starting to think about writing up findings, obviously very important to avoid stereotypes or labels, [inaudible 00:19:22] use language, and when you're presenting or sharing your findings, and of course ... probably this is not new information for you, but obviously respecting participants' privacy. Be careful of the way that you store data and report findings. If you've promised your participants anonymity or confidentiality, be sure to provide that.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: So now that we've addressed these issues, let's assume you're ready to start your qualitative research process or project, excuse me, and let's talk about
some of those key principles of data collection. The first thing to consider is your sample. Who are your participants going to be?

Kendall Cotton Bronk: The first thing to know in qualitative studies is that, with regard to to samples anyway, is that they generally feature non-probability, non-random samples. Rather than randomly sampling participants, qualitative inquiry relies on purposive sampling techniques, which means we intentionally select sample participants who are accessible, willing to provide information, and who are information-rich. So of course depending on your topic you’d want to think carefully about who are the people who are most likely to give you the most information.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: So there are lots of different approaches to purposive sampling. I'm just gonna review a few of them here, but keep in mind this is not an exhaustive list, just a sampling.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: The first approach that I wanted to share with you is called maximum variation sampling. In this approach, you look for participants who are as diverse as possible, and to do this, of course, you get a sense of the range of experiences, so the basic principle behind maximum variation sampling is to gain greater insight into a phenomenon is by looking at it from as many angles as possible. This can help the researcher to identify common themes that are evident across [inaudible 00:21:21]

Kendall Cotton Bronk: So for example if you want to understand how probation officers experience their jobs you might choose to include some probation officers who are relatively new, some who have been on the job for years. You might choose probation officers who work with different kinds of individuals in different states across the country. You'd want to get as broad a range of individuals as possible to really understand the range of experiences.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: At the other extreme is homogenous sampling. This is a sampling technique that seeks to achieve a very homogenous sample, that is a sample that shares the same or at least very similar characteristics, so for example you might look for a sample of individuals that are similar in terms of age, gender, background, occupation, you know, whatever the variables are that are of interest to you. This is basically the opposite of maximum variation sampling, and it's used when the research question asked is specific to the characteristics of a particular group of interest, which is subsequently examined in great detail. So, for example, you might use it if you wanted to understand how older adults with particular health issues experience incarceration.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: Another form of purposive sampling is the extreme case sampling. This is a type of sampling approach that is used to focus on cases that are special or unusual, typically in the sense that the cases highlight notable outcomes or notable failures or notable successes, so in other words this is really a study of outliers,
but you select the outliers that can tell you something particularly interesting or important or relevant to your topic.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: Extreme cases are really useful because they provide significant insight into a particular phenomenon and if you choose a particular success case, what you learn from these can often act as weapons or best case practices that guide future research and practice.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: Another approach to sampling in qualitative research is called the total population sampling. This is a type of purposive sampling technique where you choose to sample the entire population that has a particular set of characteristics, so they might have specific experience, specific knowledge, skills, exposure to an event, et cetera. So in these cases the entire population is chosen because the population of interest is small and leaving out someone might mean leaving out a good chunk of information. So for example you might choose to include everyone involved in a kidnapping investigation. You want parents, the police, the attorney, everybody involved in this case to really get a solid understanding of what happened here.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: And the last sampling technique that I'll talk about today is criterion sampling. This is when you select cases that meet some pre-determined criterion of importance. This sampling approach is very commonly used in mixed-method studies. In this case, researchers might use responses to a particular survey item to identify interview participants, so for example you might choose to include jails that have received [inaudible 00:24:45] violations or where they've had repeated complaints.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: So, by the way, in preparing this talk I tried to come up with examples that would be as meaningful to you, to the work that you do, as possible, but in this process I realized that although I'm very comfortable with my knowledge of qualitative research methods I'm not very familiar with the juvenile and criminal justice system, so if any of my examples seem off, I apologize.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: Anyway, the point here with the sample selection is just to keep in mind these are not convenient samples. These are very intentionally selected, and in deciding which of these approaches to employ you really have to think about what are your goals as a researcher, what is it that you want to learn?

Erin Farley: Kendall?

Kendall Cotton Bronk: Yeah.

Erin Farley: This is Erin. I was wondering, there's a little bit of background noise, and I didn't know if your microphone might be near ... it sounds like it might be near the paper, if you're ...
Erin Farley: No, that’s okay.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: I do have a paper out so I moved it over. Does it sound better now?

Erin Farley: Yeah, yeah. I think it was just possibly maybe the flipping of the paper, but okay, that’s great. Thank you so much.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: Thank you. Apologies for that.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: Alright, so the next thing to consider now that we've thought of how to sample is how many participants you're going to include. Again, here as [inaudible 00:26:10] said, most things in qualitative research, there isn’t a clear and easy, straightforward answer, but there are some guidelines that you can consider as you're making this decision. If you want more in-depth information, consider including fewer participants but plan to spend considerably more time with each one of them. If you want to capture a broader range of experiences, of course consider including more participants but spend a little less time with each one. If you're conducting research on a topic where you can get an awful lot of good, rich detailed information from a few individuals, you'll of course need fewer participants, but if you're conducting a study on a topic that any one person can really only say so much about, you'll need to include more participants.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: So in general, I think about it, and other have written about it as an inverse relationship between the amount of usable data obtained from each participant and the total number of participants you'll need for your study. In other words, the great the amount of information gathered from each participant, the fewer the number of participants you need to include. This may sound obvious, but it can be a helpful idea to keep in your mind when you're trying to figure out your sample size, and this is also, I think, one of the reasons that sample sizes often change. You might think that you're going to need a whole lot of people because each individual that you interview is only going to be able to give you so much information, but once you dive into interviews, wow, just a handful of individuals and I'm already hearing tons and so maybe I don't need quite so many.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: There's another guideline that can be helpful, too, and this is the idea of using data saturation as a guide for establishing your sample size. So this means that you keep collecting data until you start to hear the same things over and over from your participants, so once you get to the point that including more participants isn't really generating much new information you've reached the point of saturation and you know you're done, so this can be used to help guide your decision about how many observations to conduct. If you are conducting additional observations and not learning a lot of new stuff you're probably done, and it also guides the number of interviews you need to conduct, or if you're doing some form of document analysis, you know, how many documents...
you need to review. So I think both of those guidelines can help you as you're trying to determine your appropriate sample size.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: Another important point to consider, and I've sort of alluded to it already, but in conducting qualitative research is exactly what data to collect. Just about anything can serve as data in a qualitative study. Studies have been conducted on love letters, on post cards, on video clips, on social media posts. I mean, the options are really just about endless.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: That said, most qualitative research studies, and I would imagine most of the studies that you're envisioning conducting, are likely to involve interviews, so I wanted to say a little bit more about the types of interviews available to qualitative researchers and provide just a few guidelines to keep in mind when you're thinking about interviews.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: So ... Excuse me. I had to get a quick sip. If you're planning to conduct qualitative inquiry, any kind of qualitative study, you're very likely going to be conducting interviews. In reality, there is a ton to say about how to conduct effective interviews, and I'm not gonna have time to go over all or even a whole lot of this, but some of the books that I reference at the end of this talk ... in fact, I think pretty much each one of them, has an awful lot to say about how to conduct effective interviews and how to design effective interview protocols. For now, what I do want to mention is that qualitative researchers have at least three different kinds of interviews at their disposal. There are unstructured, semi-structured, and structured interviews.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: Unstructured interviews, as the name would suggest, are really more like casual conversations. They often take place between the interviewer and the participants during observations, so these are most likely not recorded and they are not guided by an interview protocol. Instead, the goal is to really try to keep, just through the course of your conversation, you try to keep participants focused on your topic of interest but you generally allow the participant to take the lead.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: Unstructured interviews are really appropriate when you're trying to build rapport, so maybe you're not exactly sure who you want to interview, you know, who are the people who are going to be able to tell you the most about your topic of interest, so you need to start with some unstructured interviews, some more casual conversation, with people to figure out to help you identify the appropriate people to interview. They also can be used when some interviewees just won't tolerate anymore. Some people, you will find, don't want to be interviewed. They don't want to sit down in a room with an interview protocol and a recording device and talk to you, but they might be willing to have a casual conversation with you so this may be all that you can do.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: Structured ... I'm sorry. Unstructured interviews can also be helpful when you're discussing sensitive topics. The reason is that you allow the participant to take
the lead, so rather than guiding the conversation, the participant is able to sort of share as much of the sensitive information as they feel comfortable sharing. It can also be really helpful just in terms of getting background information, so it'll help you design an interview protocol that is really useful.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: Semi-structured interviews are probably the most common form of interviews. These interviews include an interview protocol; they are generally audio-recorded. You generally sit down in a quiet place and have a conversation, so like I said, rather than being a causal conversation, they're planned and they're conducted someplace hopefully that feels natural and familiar and comfortable to the participant, again, as we said in the beginning, you really don't want to take them out of their environment and bring them into yours. Instead, you want to go to where they are.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: And then the last type of interview is the structured interview. Structured interviews are basically questionnaires that present questions in an invariant order. Often, these are done online, and they can be really helpful if you're trying to collect a very specific set of data from a relatively large sample. Again, sort of counterintuitively given that unstructured interviews work well in this context as well, but these structured interviews can be a good way to collect some sensitive information, especially if you're doing it online. People feel more comfortable delving into these sensitive topics when they do it over the computer rather than in a face-to-face context.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: So I want to say just a little bit more about the semi-structured interviews, since this is the type of interview I imagine you're most likely to conduct in your line of work. So one key to a successful interview is a really good interview protocol, and in creating your interview protocol there are a few things you want to keep in mind. First of all, you want to open with some really easy questions. These are questions designed to put your participant at ease and to get them talking, so to just draw them out a little. After that, you want to introduce just a few related topics. You don't want to try to cover too many different topics in a single interview or else it would take too long and you would lose your interviewee's attention. It's really better ... I mean, I think the real benefit of qualitative research, of course, is that really rich, detailed data that you're going to get, and in order to get that data you wanna cover fewer topics but go into much deeper detail around each one.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: So we generally start semi-structured interview protocols with what we call grand tour questions. These are open-ended questions, questions that don't guide your participant in any particular direction, but address the main topic that you want to explore in your study. Very important, though, with all of the questions in these interview protocols, that you don't guide your participant, and this is a ... there's really an art to writing a good interview protocol because you may not think that questions are guiding or leading but sometimes they can be, so for example rather than asking your participants, "Why don't you enjoy going to court?"
Kendall Cotton Bronk: Which of course assumes they don't enjoy this experience of going to court, you might ask them, "How do you feel about going to court?" And then ask them follow-up questions to gain more information.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: So it can be really helpful to have a second set of eyes on the interview protocol just to ensure that there are not assumptions being made or guiding phrases included.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: There are often, when you're conducting these studies, especially as you are further along in the process, some sort of hypothesis that you might want to test out. You might have a sense about how you think things are going to play out, and if you want to test out those hypotheses, it's very important to save those questions to the very end of your interview protocol. If you introduce them too soon you will unintentionally signal your interest to the participant, and you really want to see what kinds of ideas they generate on their own, at least first.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: And again, because you really want to get that rich and detailed data from your participants, you are going to have to probe. So in the interviews, you don't just ask the question and jump onto the next question. You really want to draw your participants out, and there are lots of ways to probe. You might just nod as a way of keeping your participant talking. You might ask, "Oh, that's interesting. Say more."

Kendall Cotton Bronk: Or just, "Mm-hmm (affirmative), mm-hmm (affirmative)."

Kendall Cotton Bronk: The important thing here is that you don't want to pass judgment so if the participant says something that you really like, avoid saying, "Oh, you know, that's great. Yes, I like that too."

Kendall Cotton Bronk: By inserting your own judgment or your own experience you'll be guiding the participant and you really want to avoid this at all costs. And then just as a general guideline, keep in mind that people will only tolerate about a 60 minute interview, but again that depends on the age and the circumstances of your participant. Some adults, especially if they're talking about something easy and comfortable, they may be happy going longer, maybe 90 minutes, and children and adolescents, they may lose interest even more quickly than an hour, so be really sensitive to the duration of your interview.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: The next thing I want to talk about is establishing validity. Because qualitative findings do not feature representative or randomly selected samples, their findings may not generalize to a broader population, and this is important to keep in mind when you're discussing the implications of your findings. However, they should generalize within the sample. This is one aspect of validity, so I wanna talk about how do we ensure that our qualitative findings are indeed valid?
Kendall Cotton Bronk: I like this quote. "Validity is not a commodity that can be purchased with technique."

Kendall Cotton Bronk: And I like it because, again, it sort of points out that distinction between qualitative and quantitative work. In quantitative work you can, you know, in running your stats you can make sure you check all of your assumptions and check for everything upfront and then run your stats and be fairly certain that you've done it correctly. There's not really a checklist in qualitative research. Instead, you have to really think seriously about the potential threats to validity in your particular study and consider strategies that you can use to minimize those threats.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: So, again, as with everything in qualitative research, there's no clear rules, but there are some guidelines. There are some things to think about in terms of enhancing the validity of your findings.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: The first is that you just want to make sure that you spend enough time on the study. Qualitative work takes quite a bit of time, so make sure you spend enough time interviewing, enough time collecting, conducting observations, enough time reading relevant documents so that you really understand what it is your participants are trying to tell you. It is a time-consuming pursuit, but you will get better data if you put in enough time. It's also necessary, yeah, if you want to fully understand what's going on.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: And then again, we've already talked about this so I won't go into it in so much detail, but very important to clarify your own assumptions, your own biases. Again, you can't necessarily eliminate them completely but you definitely want to bracket them and consider using some of the strategies that I talked about earlier in order to minimize the problematic aspects of having too many assumptions.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: Something else you can do just as with quantitative work is triangulation. We do quite a bit of triangulating in qualitative work, partly by collecting data, multiple forms of data, but also by collecting data from multiple informants, and if you're starting to hear the same thing from multiple individuals and you're seeing things in different places, you are more likely to feel confident that your findings are indeed valid.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: It is important, of course, though, to keep in mind that there are different problems that you're trying to guard against in identifying the appropriate strategy for enhancing the validity of your study, and if one of the issues is a self-report bias, you have to be really thoughtful about ... you know, you can't just conduct interviews and then also go read things that the individual has written because both of those, of course, are still self-report forms of data. So again, you just have to be really thoughtful about what are the particular threats to validity in the particular study you're conducting, and then identify the strategies that will enable you to best address those threats.
Kendall Cotton Bronk: Something else can be important is checking the meaning of outliers. Any finding, all findings, usually has some exceptions, and the temptation can be to sort of smooth those out, but especially in qualitative research, outliers and negative cases can really be your friend. So you good look at the sort of tales of distribution can test and strengthen and refine your basic finding.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: Another strategy can be the member check, which I talked a little bit about early on. Soliciting feedback from your respondents. This doesn't, again, make sense in all studies and it may not be feasible in some, but it can be a really useful of ensuring you, as a researcher, are really correctly understanding the participant's meaning. So something else to keep in mind.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: Qualitative researchers also often conduct sort of informal interventions. They're not experiments in qualitative work, but they're opportunities to sort of conduct these little informal interventions to see if what you think is playing out is actually playing out the way you think it should based on your discussion.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: Qualitative research, too, is often conducted in teams, and so it can be really helpful to have other people who you can bounce your emerging findings off, and see if they have alternative explanations or rival hypotheses that they want to consider, so definitely consider in the course of conducting qualitative research sharing your emerging findings with other colleagues that can help push your thinking.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: So keep in mind that you can't just pick one or two of these strategies for establishing validity and then call it a day. It's not really the way it works, as this quote suggests. Instead, you really want to think through what are the threats to validity in this study and which of these strategies might be useful in helping me minimize that threat to true validity?

Kendall Cotton Bronk: So here is ... that sort of wraps up the main principles that I really wanted to talk about, but as I said, this is really ... there's so much to say in qualitative research methods. It's such an expansive space that I can't cover everything in an hour, but I hope that that gives you a flavor of some of the things you would think about in qualitative research, of some of the situations in which it might be appropriate to conduct qualitative research, but I recognize it's certainly not the end.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: And so I wanted to share with you ... these are some of the books that I have found to be really good resources for conducting qualitative research. The first ... these are all books that cover qualitative research in social sciences more generally, so they're not all psych-based. Some of them are from different perspectives, but the first one, Cresswell, is a very big name in qualitative research and research in general, but particularly in qualitative research, and I think this is a great text. It provides an excellent overview of qualitative research broadly conceived. John Cresswell also has a wonderful mixed methods book.
out if you're thinking of using qualitative research methods to supplement some quantitative research. I recommend his mixed methods text.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: The Maxwell book is actually really great if you're actually conducting qualitative research methods, so it actually has some activities. It'll sort of talk through how, when you're writing down, trying to think through your assumptions and your biases that you might be bringing to a particular study, it has some really good examples of how you could prepare a memo and what are the things you should think about and what you should include, so I think of that as a nice companion when you're actually in the throes of conducting a qualitative study, particularly for the first few times.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: Patton is a great book. It's focused particularly on qualitative research and evaluation methods, so if you're involved in some sort of evaluation and you want to use qualitative research methods this is an excellent book for thinking about how to use qualitative research methods in the context of an evaluation.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: Merriam is another just excellent overview of qualitative research methods, more generally.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: Taylor and Bodgan, this approach is, again, another nice overview. It really emphasizes a grounded theory, which is a particular approach to qualitative research methods. It deals with trying to develop a theory about how things work, so that may be nice if that's one of your goals.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: And then the last text is a case study, so if you're interested, a lot of times people use qualitative work in the form of case studies, and so this book will guide into how to conduct qualitative case studies more specifically.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: So thank you so much for your time. Thank you for your attention. I include here my email address. If I can help you further, please feel free to shoot me an email. Otherwise, if there are any questions, I tried to leave a little bit of time here at the end to answer any questions I can. But thank you.

Erin Farley: Great. Kendall, thank you so much. Well, yeah, we'll let people type in any questions that they might have. In the meantime, I actually had a question. I was hoping to get your sense of ... when you were speaking about validity and inter-rater reliability and ... this might be a very random question, but you know, there's a process to designing and coming up with concepts, agreeing on the concepts and the definition, and then two people theoretically look at the same document and code it and then you come together and you find out how, to what degree your coding is similar or divergent.

Erin Farley: And I was wondering, 'cause I think to a certain extent for researchers in certain agencies there might be always a limitation for time, and so is there any practicality to sampling? Like, let's say you interview ... this might ... I don't know, like 50 people, would it make any sense to sample from there and do
inter-rater reliability on that smaller sample? Is there any validity to that process, or would you, from your experience, say, you know, I would actually recommend investing the time and planning to assess all of them.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: Yeah, no. That's a great point, and there's actually a great article I love that talks about the use of numbers in qualitative research, and some of the pluses and minuses to all different kinds of numbers, but including things like inter-rater reliability.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: So yeah, in a lot of the work that we do we do establish a kappa coefficient, and that is where you determine how many times the two coders agreed, and you take out of the chance agreement, and then you end up with a kappa coefficient, and there are guidelines that will say, you know, this is an acceptable level of agreement, that's an excellent one, and this is not so good.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: And so I definitely can see some utility in using inter-rater reliability, and I do an awful lot of publishing and often I will ... and people like to hear about inter-rater reliability. It can also facilitate larger sample sizes, so like you said, if you are conducting 50 or 60 interviews and you've got this huge stack of transcripts then what you might do is review sometimes 10, sometimes 20% of them together. Maybe take 10 of them, you sit down, you talk together, you see if you're seeing the same things. You go back and start to develop your coding scheme. You go back and you grab another 10% and sort of meet and talk again, and then once you have your coding scheme done and you feel like, okay, we have a very sufficient inter-rater relatability kappa coefficient here then you can divvy up the rest of the interviews and code them separately.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: And so that can be an efficient way of doing it. In some cases, I don't think an inter-rater reliability is always necessary, and the reason is that you should be ... usually in your presentation of the data, you're including enough of the quotations, enough of the data to hopefully convince your reader that, yeah, they see it the same way you do, and I also think that something in qualitative research, something that's different than quantitative research is that data collection and data analysis are really more simultaneous processes. Sometimes you can't avoid it. Sometimes you have to conduct all the interviews and then go back and code them all, but really, I think what is preferable is for you to go to conduct a handful of interviews and then code them and then maybe even revise your interview protocol and go out and conduct more interviews, code those ... and kind of, you know, so it's more of an iterative process, and in that case, at the very end, once you have an established inter-rater reliability you could go back and research-code everything to ensure if you wanted to give your reader some idea of how commonly different themes appeared and things like that. But because you're doing it more of an interactive process you're less likely to divvy up the work, so.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: Pluses and minuses.
Erin Farley: No, thank you. That was great. Okay, well, I'm not seeing any questions right now so what we're gonna do is launch the poll, and if everybody could just take a minute to answer a few of these questions that would be wonderful. We would appreciate it.

Erin Farley: So Kendall, what course are you teaching right now?

Kendall Cotton Bronk: I am teaching ... Let's see. I'm teaching a child development course, and I teach a class for first year doctoral students, which is called Directed Research, and I'm teaching a Theories of Lifespan Development, but I'll be teaching a semester-long qualitative research methods course online in the spring, and I taught one last spring in a face-to-face sort of format, so I do enjoy the qualitative research methods and I do a lot of qualitative research methods, so.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: I think it's a lot of fun, and like I said, some people ... I always think it's funny. By halfway through the semester I have some students that are pulling out there, and they're saying, "Just tell me the answer. How many ... In a quantitative study I can run a G-power analysis to tell me exactly how many participants I need and I feel like you just won't tell me."

Kendall Cotton Bronk: And other students who love it, because they feel like, "Wow, this is kind of freeing. As long as I have a really good justification for why I'm gonna do it this way I have a lot of latitude in how I approach this work."

Kendall Cotton Bronk: So I find experiences to be a bit across the board.

Erin Farley: Yeah, I can appreciate both of those aspects for sure.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: Right, yeah?

Erin Farley: And I appreciate also the list of books, you know? I think that that's great. I'm actually, myself, gonna look up a couple of those that you provided.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: Oh, good.

Erin Farley: So thank you so much, and well, I think our hour is just about up, so I just want to take a moment to again thank you for your time and thank everyone for attending, and if you have any questions, there's Kendall's email and hopefully we will see you at the next webinar. We don't have any specifically announced right now, but we have some tentatively scheduled so we're just ironing out the final details, and so come back to our website or you might be getting our email notifications about webinars, so keep an eye out for those.

Kendall Cotton Bronk: Thanks, Erin. Thank you for having me.

Erin Farley: Thank you so much. Take care.
Kendall Cotton Bronk: Mm-hmm (affirmative), bye-bye.

Erin Farley: Bye.