Research With Archival Data

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DIY research.
Archival research.
Research Rocks

- But it isn’t cheap...or easy.
  - Trust me...it isn’t cheap or easy.
  - Not to dissuade you, but even my smallest grant funded projects have required hundreds and hundreds of working hours.
  - Think about the steps involved.
  - 1. Concept to research question.
But it isn’t cheap...or easy.

2. Research question to methods.

3. Methods to grant proposal.

4. Grant proposal to award management.

5. Award management to IRB.

6. IRB to sample.
But it isn’t cheap...or easy.

7. Sample to data capture.

8. Data capture to analyses.

9. Analyses to dissemination.

10. Dissemination to renewal funding!

You get the picture.
Is there an easier way?

Note the complexity, time, and money involved in getting a sample suitable for analyses.

Steps 1-8!

Wouldn’t it be fabulous if you could find data closely aligned with your research question and bypass these first 8 steps!

You can with a single caveat.
Archival Research Requires Flexibility

- Caveat: You must be flexible with your RQ.

- A wealth of public (open source) datasets available.

- Your tax dollars at work.

- The hitch? You are stuck with survey items selected by dataset authors/investigators.

- The trick is to find an archival dataset roughly aligned with your RQ.
Caveat: You must be flexible with your RQ.

- Then, make adjustments to RQ allowing you to construct meaningful analyses using the archival source.

- Beware! You still must establish a literature gap for this new RQ.

- A drawback for these resources is their wide availability.

- This means the datasets have likely been mined (heavily) by others.
Caveat: You must be flexible with your RQ.

Don’t be discouraged, just be careful.

Look very carefully at survey codebooks/items.

You may discover novel opportunity.

Let’s take a tour of the General Social Survey (GSS), managed by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago.
Health Science Databases

- Nursing and allied health care.
  - CDC Wonder portal.
  - Centers for Disease Control has created a search portal for public access (open source) health databases.
  - National Library of Medicine (NIH)
Education Databases

- Public education.
  - National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).
    - [http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/](http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/)
  - US Census
  - Many other options available.