# Criminology 321 / Week 8
## Qualitative Interactive Methods



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# Interactive Methods

- No methods are more central to qualitative research
  - central to phenomenological approaches
  - used to gather information to test/challenge widely held beliefs and/or shed light on aspects of society about which little is known
  - "gives voice" to groups who otherwise would not be heard

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Oral History
Surveys
In-Depth Interviews
Focus Group Discussions

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# Generating Questions

**What/how to ask?**

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## How to ask Meaningful Questions

- **Theory** (both inductively and deductively generated) can direct us to key variables to include in the interview/survey
- Our **objectives** also can help identify issues, particularly with evaluation research that comes with clear requirements
- The **literature** also is often useful, both:
  - The professional/academic literature
  - The professional/lay literature/media

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## How to ask Meaningful Questions

- Especially helpful are sources where factions/stakeholders **debate** (e.g., climate emergency, reconciliation, changes in law)
- Questions also arise from **exploratory research**
  - One example of how *qualitative* approaches can also help make better *quantitative* research
  - Incorporating "local knowledge" makes for more connected results and understandings, better policy

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## How to ask Meaningful Questions

- Do **pilot testing**
  - Ideally done with people similar to eventual participants
  - Gives a chance to make sure questions are clear, understandable, order okay, flows from section to section

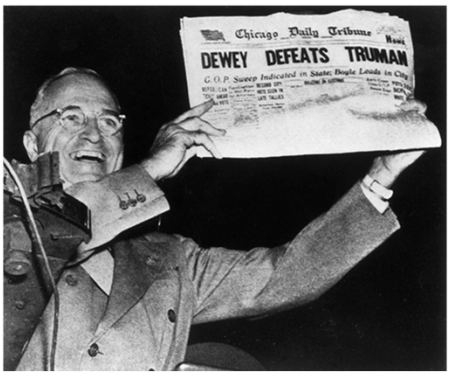
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## Surveys/Polling

- Examples go back to antiquity
- Early 20th century -- the Literary Digest muses about public opinion polling as a democratic tool
- More systematic development came in the 1930s/1940s with development of sampling
- First big name in survey research was Gallup. Everything went great until ...

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## Gallup 1936



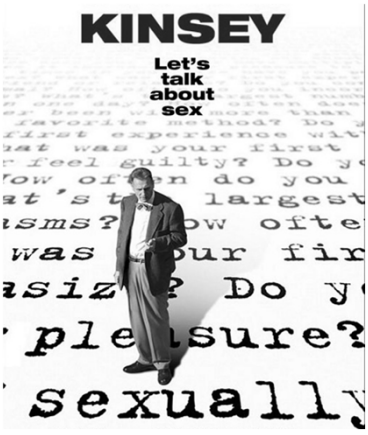

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## Early Use of Surveys

- A classic example is the sex research begun in the 1940s by Alfred Kinsey and his colleagues
- Driven by the ignorance of the time
- He and colleagues gathered sexual histories across the USA



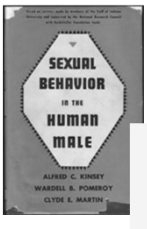
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## Early Use of Surveys

- Objective was simply to describe human sexual behaviour
- Highly controversial
- Books greeted with everything from appreciation to derision







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## Early Use of Surveys

- Kinsey's research was very much in the qualitative tradition of "giving voice"
  - To the marginalized
  - To important and controversial topics on which ignorance prevailed
- One thing his and other studies show is how much people appreciate a non-judgemental, empathetic, independent person to talk to

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## Telephone Surveys

- First phone adopters were urban, wealthy
- Phone samples too biased
- National samples primarily involved door-to-door approach through random sampling or multi-stage cluster samples



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## Telephone Surveys

- As telephone coverage became virtually universal in North America, numerous advantages accrue:
  - No need to leave the office; safety/efficiency
  - Numbers are connected to physical place
  - Geographic sampling possible, e.g., 604-873-9787
  - Random Digit Dialing overcomes 'unlisted' problem
  - One house = one phone number
- Digital world ends this simplicity

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## Surveys

**Advantages**

- Can amass large amounts of data quickly
- Perceptual
- Categorical responses allow for quantitative analysis with e.g., SPSS
- Open-ended responses allow for qualitative analysis with e.g., NVivo
- Flexible, e.g., can include experiments

**Limitations**

- Interaction minimal, can't clarify or ask for elaboration
- Must pilot test to ensure understandability; more difficult with diverse populations
- Lower response rates
- More generic, less contextual
- Easy to do, but difficult to do well

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## Web-Based Surveys

**Advantages**

- Internet gives access to interesting and diverse samples worldwide
- Easy to make changes
- Operates 24/7/365 for participants' and your convenience
- Easy to do multiple languages, adaptive questioning, skip patterns, audio/video/text
- No transcription errors

**Limitations**

- For more open research, unknown sample qualities, which is becoming more complicated
- Fine for targeted samples, but "representative sample" now more difficult to get
- Surveillance economy of internet makes using digital tools difficult

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## Interviews

**Table 7.1** Strengths and limitations of in-depth interviews

| Strengths | Limitations |
|---|---|
| Gain in-depth and personal level data on experiences, life stories, feelings, etc. | One-to-one interview, no feedback from others |
| Useful for sensitive topics | Need skills to establish rapport, motivate, listen and react to interviewees |
| Get contextual information | Flexibility needed to change topic order in interview guide to follow interviewee's story |
| Get personal stories, experiences of people | Transcription of interviews is time consuming |

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## Surveys & Interviews

- Surveys and interviews combine well for mixed methods studies/sequential designs
- Survey first provides context; interviewees can then elaborate further. Cascading design
- Interviews first help ensure that survey questions are meaningful, understandable, use local vocabulary

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