

Criminology 321 / Week 8

Qualitative Interactive Methods

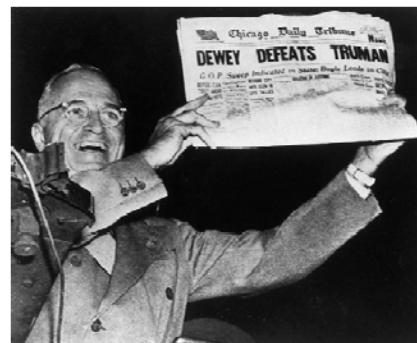


Surveys
In-Depth Interviews
Focus Group Discussions

Surveys/Polling

- Examples go back to antiquity
- Early 20th century -- the Literary Digest mused 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 ...

Gallup 1936



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

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; selection protocols used
- Digital world ends this simplicity

Surveys

Advantages

- Software makes construction and web delivery easy
- Various companies offer access to participant pools
- Can amass large amounts of data quickly
- Perceptual; Allows for quantitative analysis

Limitations

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

Surveys & Interviews

- Surveys and interviews combine well for mixed methods studies
- Surveys first provide context; interviewees can then elaborate further
- Interviews first help ensure that survey questions are meaningful, understandable, use local vocabulary

Web-Based Surveys

- Numerous advantages
 - Access to interesting and diverse samples worldwide
 - Easy to make changes after pretesting
 - Operates 24/7/365 for your and participants' convenience
 - Easy to do multiple languages; adaptive questioning; skip patterns; audio/video/text
 - No transcription errors
- Main limitation is unknown sample qualities; the “representative sample” now more difficult to get

Interactive Methods

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

Interviews

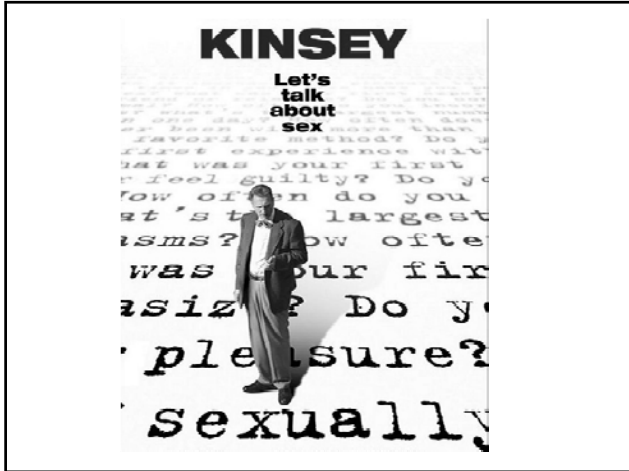
Table 7.1 Strengths and limitations of in-depth interviews

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

Interactive Methods

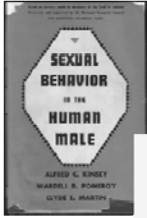

- A classic example is the sex research begun in the 1940s by Alfred Kinsey and his colleagues
- Driven by the ignorance of the time
- He and colleagues gathered sexual histories across the USA





Interactive Methods

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



Interactive Methods

- 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

Generating Questions

What/how to ask?

Common Mistake I: Asking Silly Questions

#1. Asking silly questions that will not get us any closer to our objective. But what if our objective is to ask silly questions? Will people answer them?



Ask a Silly Question...

- As this video clip illustrates, some people (30-40%) will answer questions even when they have no basis in fact
- Conclusion is *not* that *they* must be silly for doing so, but that *we* must bear the responsibility for ensuring what we ask people is meaningful, and not trite.

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

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
 - A prime example of how *qualitative* approaches can also help make better *quantitative* research
 - Incorporating “local knowledge” makes for more connected results and understandings, better policy

How to ask Meaningful Questions

- Biggest trick: To ensure your questions arise from your objectives and speak to the issues you want to address
- Introduction and conclusion must/will “speak” to each other
- Like peeling away layers of an onion, with successive embellishments that ensure you get somewhere.
 - e.g., VPD/MRDS