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# Crim 321: Qualitative Research Methods

## Study Questions for Hennink et al / Chapter 7

### In-depth Interviews

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1. In-depth interviews have been described as a “conversation with a purpose.” But according to your text, how apt is that notion of it being a “conversation”?
2. What do the authors of your text see as the unique strengths that interviews can bring to the information we gather to try and understand the world? For what types of information are they most useful?
3. Although it’s the next chapter that will talk about focus groups in greater detail, the authors offer a few tidbits about differences they see in the strengths and central focus of one-on-one interviews versus focus groups. What are those and what do they tell you about when each would be most useful? Given what you’ve seen of both thus far, does it seem like both of them might be used – perhaps to complement one another -- in one multi-method study? Explain.
4. How do the authors distinguish between the questions and interactions involved in a one-on-one interview versus the kinds of questions and interaction researchers have when doing a survey?
5. The authors of your text start talking their way through the interview process by breaking it down into parts. Step One (“Introduction”) is where you start to set the context for the interview and break the ice with your participant. What sorts of information are important to include in that introduction to your project?
6. After some preliminary contextualizing and explaining, you are ready to start moving more directly into whatever your topic is. What are you trying to accomplish in the transition that happens with those “opening questions”?
7. Next come what the text refers to as the “key questions” of your interview. How does the text justify waiting until this point in the interview to get to what is really the heart of what you are trying to find out? Wouldn’t you want to do that sooner? Explain.
8. Appropriately enough, you finish the interview with “closing questions.” What is their purpose?
9. The text emphasizes the idea that any interview should have a logical flow to it, and that you should be able to move smoothly from question to question and topic to topic. But whose understanding and way of thinking about the topic should the interview reflect – the researcher’s or the interviewee’s? What are some ways you can accomplish that? The text gives some hints, but can you think of others?

10. Doing research involves going back and forth between the abstract concepts that interest us as researchers in criminology or whatever discipline, and the concrete examples we can pull of those concepts from everyday life. While it is important that the questions we ask reflect the concepts and theories that interest us – we need to ensure we stay on track. What are some of the important considerations the authors of your text think you should keep in mind as you go through that process of question design that will help ensure you have built an appropriate bridge between those two levels (the abstract concept and its concrete manifestations) and give your participants a meaningful way to respond?
11. Interviewers hate yes/no answers. The decision to go with an interview is ground in the idea that we hope people will go on at length in telling us their stories and explaining their lives. The text gives one example (on p.124) to show how a yes/no question can be turned into an “open” one -- one that calls for a more elaborate response. What does that example tell you about how to create a more “qualitative” question? Can you generate another example, perhaps related to whatever area of criminology interests you that you might ask in an interview?
12. What are “topical probes” and how might they be useful in an interview?
13. What is “pilot testing” and what does it help accomplish? With whom should you do that?
14. An important choice concerns where the interview will be located. What are some of the considerations you should keep in mind when deciding where to hold an interview?
15. Interviews can be done through all sorts of media, but the most valued are the ones that are done face-to-face. Of course, this creates a social interaction where two humans who most often were previously strangers to one another sit down to talk about what are often very personal and sensitive issues. Even more than that, we are often talking to people in communities we are not a part of about life experiences we may never have had. What can you do as an interviewer to help make that a comfortable interaction ... for example, in the way that you appear, and in the positionality you claim?
16. Completing a good interview is hard work, in part because you need to be doing and thinking about so many things at the same time. One of the first things you need to do is to establish rapport with your participant. What do researchers mean when they talk about “rapport” and what are some things you can do to help establish it?
17. What are some signs you would look for that you would take as an indication that you are indeed establishing rapport with your participant?
18. If there’s a central message to the “Asking and motivational probing” section of this chapter, for me it’s that it’s not about you – the researcher – but about your participant ... making them feel comfortable, . What are some of the things that you should keep in mind when asking questions to ensure that is the case? How about if the people you are interviewing are people who have done nasty things or are espousing views you disagree with?

19. A good interview will see the participant talking way more than you do, but sometimes people give shorter answers, in which case we want to encourage them to elaborate, often by using different kinds of probes. What are some of the different probes you can use?
20. Interviews can feel incredibly personal and it is amazing what people will share with you when you do this well. It is a real privilege to be entrusted with intimate details from people's lives. But after going into all those details and sharing the emotions associated with them, every interview ends. What are some things you should be attending to when closing down the interview before you go your separate ways?
21. After you part, what do the authors of your text encourage you to start doing right away? Why?
22. Pay heed to the strengths and limitations that are generally associated with interviews that are listed in Table 7.1, as these will become important as we learn about other methods with their own strengths and limitations, which we will also need when deciding in any given research situation just which will be most useful in helping us address the research questions we pose.