Criminology 321 / Week 7
Qualitative Interactive Methods

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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

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Surveys
In-Depth Interviews
Focus Group Discussions

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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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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; selection protocols used
- Digital world ends this simplicity

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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

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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

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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

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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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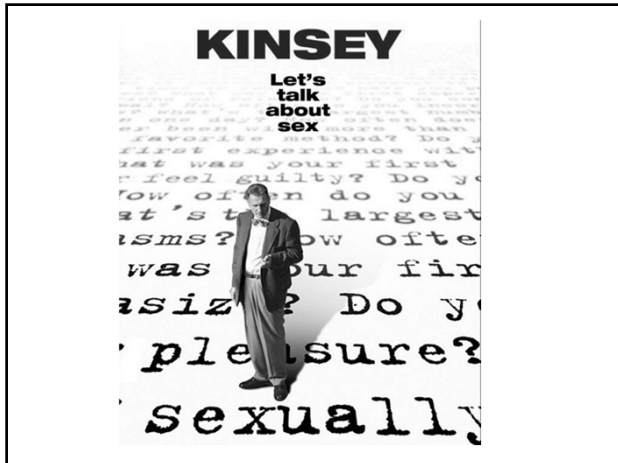## Interactive Methods

- 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

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Interactive Methods

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

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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

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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
  - 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

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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

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Attitudes	Job Satisfaction	MRDS has had a positive effect on my job satisfaction.
	Effectiveness	I think MRDS helps me be a more effective officer. MRDS produces so much information it makes me a less effective officer.
	Safety	I think MRDS makes policing a lot safer. MRDS can create a false sense of security with suspects.
	(In)dependence	I find that with MRDS I end up relying on the system more and more.
	Relations with Community	I find I check out a lot more people on CPIC now than I did before MRDS.
	Overall	Overall I like MRDS.
Use/Behaviour	Ease of data access	With MRDS I get information much more quickly than with radio only. I feel tied to my car with MRDS.
	Frequency of Access	With MRDS I probably investigate cars or people I otherwise wouldn't have bothered with.
	1-person vs 2-person patrol	MRDS is of less use when I'm on patrol by myself than when I have a partner.
	(Non)Stressful Situations	MRDS is of less use in highly stressful situations.
	MRDS vs Radio	I would rather work in a radio-only car. [Situational scenarios also addressed this element]
Implications	Implications for officers: ○ Professionalism ○ Man/Machine ○ Autonomy/Self-Def'n	[See "attitudes" section; also arose in more depth in interviews; big differences among officers in how they saw themselves and how they related to the machine; some viewed it as a duller of instincts and human connectedness, while others saw it as something that gave them autonomy, control, professionalism]
	Relations within VPD	MRDS makes me more independent of the dispatcher.
	Relations between police and community	Ultimately I think MRDS dehumanizes policing. I feel more independent of the community with MRDS.

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Managing the Interview
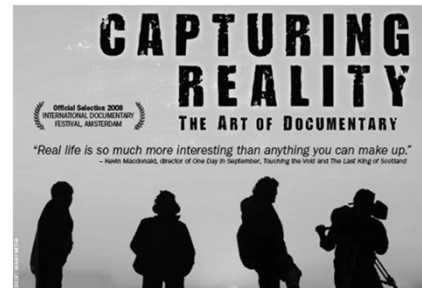
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Before You Begin

- 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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Before You Begin

- Make sure people are comfortable
- Be friendly, dress appropriately, make eye contact, show interest/appreciation
- If on your turf, get ready ahead of time. If on theirs, chat while you set up
- Make small talk – Helps rapport
- Make sure equipment is working correctly

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Interview Guide Structure

- Semi-structured interviews more flexible
- Quantitative emphasizes similar *wording*; qualitative emphasizes similar *meaning*
- Start with list of topics arranged in logical order, but be prepared to go with the flow – we want participant's logic, not yours

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Less Structured Approaches

- In less structured interviews the researcher is more likely to begin with a list of themes to be addressed
- The trick here is to set the right tone/rhythm from the outset
  - Better to ask "how" than "why"
  - "Everyone has a story; what's yours?"

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Validity

How do we know what we have reflects what our participants see, do, feel, think?

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Validity

- How do we know our data are "true" representations of how people feel/think?
- Several different ways we establish validity in qualitative research
  - Process
  - Procedures

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Process

- **Time**
  - The longer we are in the field, the more difficult it is for us to be bullshat; the more we build relationships
- **Rapport**
  - If you have the interests of the group at heart that will come out over time
- **Collaboration**
  - Involving participants in a collaborative process – before and/or after the project – to give them a stake

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Process

- Triangulation
  - E.g., in MRDS study, surveys gave us distributions; interviews gave us details and allowed us to probe about inconsistencies; observations cross-checked behaviour
- Being reflexive/self-critical
  - Consider what you bring to the site
  - Critically evaluate your evidence

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Procedures

- Recall from the Kinsey clip:
  - The importance of making clear what you are doing to ensure confidentiality; more important the more sensitive the topic
  - Maintain proximity; make eye contact; be comfortable yourself; make *them* comfortable
  - Non-judgmental attitude: goal is understanding

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Procedures

Take heed of Berg's

"Ten Commandments of Interviewing"

1. *Never begin an interview cold*
2. *Remember your purpose*
3. *Present a natural front*
4. *Demonstrate aware hearing*
5. *Think about appearance*

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Procedures

6. *Interview in a comfortable place*
7. *Don't be satisfied with monosyllabic answers*
8. *Be respectful*
9. *Practice, practice, and practice some more*
10. *Be cordial and appreciative*

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Interview Guide Structure

- The general structure/process of a semi-structured interview looks like this:
  1. Idle chat to make people feel comfortable
  2. Transition to the interview; make sure participant understands purpose, role, process; okay to record? [But take notes as well!]
  3. Gather basic *background information*: creates a question-response structure; begins rapport

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Interview Guide Structure

4. Some *general opening questions* that are directly related to the topic of the interview. A shift from brief descriptive information to longer more explanatory answers.
5. *Key questions* are core questions that address the research question; use of *probes* to encourage lengthier responding
6. *Closing questions*; emotional release
7. Answer any questions and say thanks.

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Online Interviews

- email painful, but ends up with transcript
- with Zoom or similar, confidentiality concerns exist, but a great alternative for less sensitive topics
- advantage that no travel is required, but never as good as in-person

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Analysis

- Later this semester we'll start doing exercises in tutorials that will give you practice at identifying themes, creating categories, coding
- Qualitative software is available to help you organize, thematize, e.g., NVivo
- More on this to come

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