Introduction to Social Research

Week 4:

Field Research and Questionnaire

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I. Sampling & Generalizability

What is sampling?

- **Sampling**: "inferences about a whole class of objects made from observations of a subset of such objects" (Singleton, Straits, 2010, p.150)

- **Everyday behaviour**: helps take decisions

- **Problems**: adequacy of samples, generalizability

What is the unit of analysis?

- **Unit of analysis**: individual people, group, organizations, social categories, social institution, society, newspaper editorials, cities?

- How many such units or cases have to be chosen, by what method?

- **Heterogeneity between social elements**: variation in the population should be represented adequately in one's sample

Sampling designs

- **Representative of the target population**: close approximation of certain characteristics

- **Sampling design**: the way cases are chosen for observation

- **Two categories**:
    1. Probability samplings: random selection
    2. Nonprobability samplings: nonrandom selection

Probability samplings

- **Random selection**: each element in a population has an equal chance of being selected

- **Two criteria**:

    1. a complete list of the population

    2. the random selection of cases

Nonprobability samplings

- In many instances, **the only viable means of case selection**

- **Comparison with the archaeologist**: discover only fragments

- **Access to the population**: "hidden" population (mental illness, homeless population, marijuana smokers, etc.)

Nonprobability samplings

- **Convenience sampling**: case selection that are conveniently available

- **Snowball sampling**: chain of interviewees (evangelicalism and elites, deviant behaviours)

- **Purposive sampling**: case selection done on expert judgment of the investigator

- **Quota sampling**: division of the population into relevant strata (age, gender, race, etc.)

Theoretical sampling

- **Theory-ladeness:** gathering information relevant to a specific working hypothesis or theory

- **Search for what conventional wisdom declares unusual**

- **What is an important topic?** Hierarchy of credibility (Becker, 1998)

The choice of a sampling design

- **It follows some typical questions** (Singleton, Straits, 2010):

    1. What is the stage of research?

    2.How will the data be used?

    3. What are the available resources for drawing the sample?

    4. How will the data be collected?

    5. What is the purpose of the research?

Generalization

- **What is generalization?**

  1. "What we can say about what we didn't see on the basis of what we did see" (Becker, 1998, p.75)

  2. Define tendencies: distribution or universal process

- **Probability sample**: mathematical argument

- **Convenience sampling**: respondents' own assessments of generalizability, similarity of dynamics and constraints, depth, theory independent of qualifiers, corroboration from other studies

- **Purposive sampling**: instances of every important variation have been studied/maximizing the chances of the odd case turning up

II. Design of Interview Guide

What is an Interview?

- **Why interviewing?** Access to specific settings – access to people's interior experiences – access to the past (Weiss, 1994)

- **5 categories of respondents**: experts/witnesses of an event, or people affected by an event, or knowledgeable insider, or marginal, or retiree

- **Example**: bill concerning the grant of divorce that made it through Parliament or people affected by such a bill

Survey & Interview

	Survey	Qualitative
Questions	Closed and standardized	Open-ended and dynamic
Answers	Precategorized-response	Open response
Sample	Large, and "mathematically" representative	Might be narrow, and not necessarily "mathematically" representative
Analysis	Statistical measures: counting and correlating	Case descriptions: interpretation, summary, integration
Advantages	Quantitative comparison	Great deal of information
Disadvantages	Fragmented attitudes and observations	Responses are less "categorizable"

Why qualitative interviewing?

- Developing detailed descriptions

- Integrating multiple perspectives

- Describing process

- Developing holistic descriptions

- Learning how events are interpreted

- Bridging intersubjectivities

- Identifying variables and framing hypotheses for quantitative research

Panel of Informants

- **Several units of analysis (Weiss, 1994)**:

    1. Events: report on a flood, epidemic, riot, etc.

    2. Organization: hospital, school, army, etc.

    3. A loose collectivity: community, network of associates, *chonaikai*, etc.

    4. A social institution: marriage, profession of politics, etc.

Panel of Informants

- **Get the agreement of people**: legitimacy, confidentiality, right sponsorship

- "I don't know anything that someone in that group doesn't know but, since I know what they all know, I know more than anyone of them. " (Everett Hughues)

Interview Guide

- The problem

- A sense of the breadth and density of the material we want to collect

- A repertoire of understandings

- Pilot research

- A sense of what will give substance to the eventual report

Interview Guide

- **List of topics-to-learn-about**: designing pilot interviews

- **Starting points**: events and history

- **Next step**: specific topics & the interviewee attitudes

- **Adaptation**: situations that we do not know first-hand

- **Some tricks**: "are things better or worse around here than they used to be?"

III. An Illustration: New Religion Movement Affiliation & Disaffiliation

The Unification Church（統一教会）

- The sect was founded in South Korea in 1954 by Moon Sun-myung

- **Practices & Membership:**

- Mass wedding,

- Moonies agree to contribute to the payment of personal indemnity for human sinfulness,

- 50,000 members at the church's height in the late 1970s

- **Economic & Political Influence:** billion-dollar worldwide enterprise (luxury hotels, fishing fleets, ski resorts, gun-manufacturing, The Washington Times)
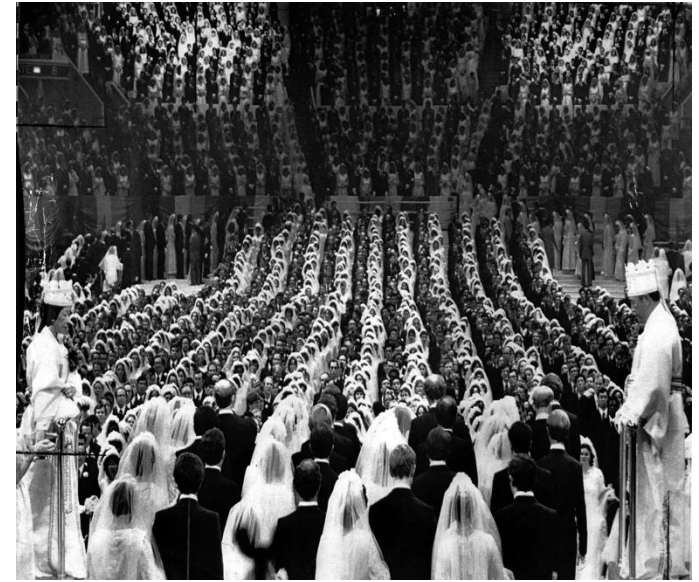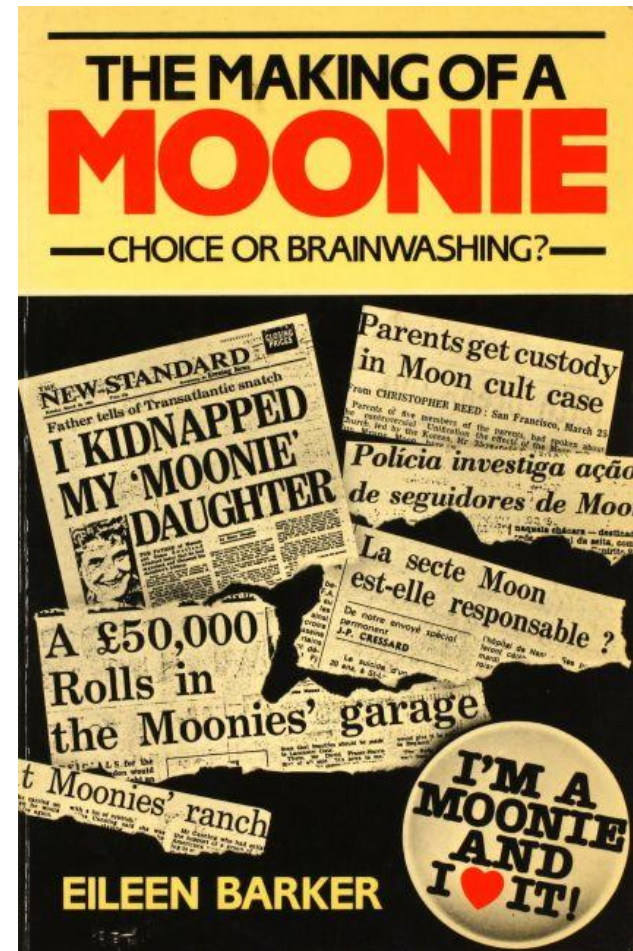

Source: NYT, Sept. 2, 2012

Social & Academic Context

- Social relevance: Part of New Religious movements in the 1960s~70s in the West

- Barker Eileen, 1984, *The Making of a Moonie: Choice or Brainwashing?*, Blackwell Publishers

Research Method

- Seven years of study of Unification Church members in the United Kingdom and the United States

- **Overt participant observation:** She lived with Moonies at various centers.

- **In-depth interviews:** 36 at the start of the research, between 2 and 12 hours.

- **Questionnaires:** A pilot study (sample of 20), followed by a full study of all Moonies in the UK (about 500).

How and Why People Become a Moonie?

- Barker: "I have not been persuaded that they are brainwashed Zombies"

- Converts have no special characteristics

- Individuals eventually decide by themselves: "Conversion to the movement is the result of a (limited) number of individual experiences; it is not the result of mass-induced hypnosis"

- No evidence of coercion

- Moonies attend residential courses where they are subject to carefully controlled situations

- Distorted versions of Moonie history and activity may be given to enhance its image

Brainwashing, mind control, coercive persuasion

- **APA Task Force on Deceptive and Indirect Methods (or Techniques) of Persuasion and Control, 1983:** "expose cult methods and tactics"

- Rejection of the report, 1987: lack if scientific rigor
- Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi: "lacking psychological theory, the report resorts to sensationalism in the style of certain tabloids, (...) the term 'brainwashing' is not a recognized theoretical concept, and is just a sensationalist 'explanation' more suitable to 'cultists' and revival preachers."

How to generalize those results?

- **The sample: complexity to reach believers and demonstrate their representativeness**

- **The interview guide: make believers recall, depict, and explain their past strong emotional experiences**

- **Generalization**: from individual personal experiences to a general affiliation/disaffiliation process

IV. Conclusions

Conclusions

- **The delimitation of a sample**: constraints, accuracy, and generalizability

- **Framing the interview scene**: the art to get hands on information

- **A critical issue**: make people speak about their past events, **beliefs, and emotions**

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