

The background of the slide features a series of concentric circles and a dashed line, creating a subtle geometric pattern. The main content is presented within a large orange rectangle that has a small triangular point at the bottom center.

# Qualitative Data Collection: International Fieldwork and Interviews

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# Purpose of Your Interviews

- Think about how interviews fit into the broader methodology of your paper
  - Are they a core component of hypothesis testing?
  - Or do they add a narrative?
- Interviews can also serve to build relationships for future fieldwork and as “soaking and poking” or theory-building
- Learning by doing is also important tactic

# Sampling

- Depends on the purpose of the interviews
  - Randomness is a challenge
- Cold-calling; local contacts/networking
- As a rule of thumb, start at the bottom
- Also think consider your social capital

# Institutional Review Board (IRB)

- With a few exceptions, you'll need to get IRB approval to use any data from interviews in a paper
  - Do this beforehand – can't be retroactive
- IRB ensures your procedures follow ethical and legal standards to protect human subjects
- IRB staff are available to answer questions – and your adviser can guide your application
- Information is available:
  - <https://research.umd.edu/irb>
  - GVPT Liaisons are: Dr. Glass and Dr. Banks

## IRB (continued)

- Key items to consider:
  - Risk to human subjects – be honest
    - This will (in part) determine the review tract
    - Full, Expedited, or Exempt
  - Informed Consent
    - Written consent is preferred by IRB
    - Verbal consent is possible in some instances
  - Overseas Considerations
    - Legal requirements of different countries
      - Ex. GDPR in the EU
    - Working with faculty who have gone through this process is helpful

# Risks of Participation

- Who are you interviewing and what would happen if their answers/participation became public knowledge?
  - Air on the side of being more protective of participants safety even than they themselves are
- Ways to mitigate risk:
  - Keep participants anonymous
  - Encrypt and separate data
  - Pseudonymize transcripts
- Advancing Research on Conflict (ARC)
  - <https://advancingconflictresearch.com/>

# Potential Sources of Bias

- There's no such thing as a fly on the wall
  - Need to be considerate in thinking about why subjects are providing the answers that they do
  - Interviewer Effects: How does the subject perceive you?
    - Naïve, professional, with suspicion?
    - On a related note, aspects of academia may be unfamiliar to respondents
  - Many have a narrative they want to get out

## Tension with Surrendering the Wheel

- You may begin an interview with a topic you'd like to discuss, or a quote you'd like to get for a narrative (especially in the theory-building stage)
- BUT you need to let them drive the conversation - in the sense of determining their own independent answers and talk only about subjects they're comfortable with
  - Also, you can't hardball subjects – this isn't cable news
- You ask questions, they'll give the response they're comfortable with, then approach their answers critically after the interview is over



## Honesty and Reliability

- Alex Haley goes to the Gambia when writing *Roots*, tells everyone he meets about Kunta Kinte being kidnapped outside his village. Sure enough he eventually finds someone who confirms his story
  - ...but that person heard about what Alex Haley wanted to hear ahead of time. Case of circular reporting.
- Can be an issue with snowball sampling, but also if you tell the subject your hypotheses going into the interview
- Need to balance being honest about your project, with not biasing the subject

# Snowball Sampling

- Valid way to recruit subjects in certain circumstances
- Limits swathe of population you'll be speaking to
- Similar to circular reporting also need to be cautious of:
  - Sharing too much information about who you've talked to and what they said
  - A) It violates confidentiality
  - B) Can contribute to biased responses. You're not aware of the relationship dynamics occurring in a network (in-fighting, competition, etc.)
    - Subjects could alter their responses to fit the narrative a friend or superior provided
    - Or alter them to dispute a narrative provided by a rival
    - This could also all be happening behind the scenes (they're familiar with what the other person would tell you, another reason to be careful with snowball sampling)

## Further Resources

- *Interview Research in Political Science*. Ed. Layna Mosley. 2013. Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Weiss, Robert. 1993. *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. New York: Free Press.