
What previous Directive Commissioners have to say...

We have worked with a range of academics from across disciplines who have commissioned Directives. Some have come across the project for the first time and others have used Mass Observation significantly in their teaching and research.

As a result, we have put together feedback and advice from those who have experienced the commissioning process and hope you will find this of use when considering a collaboration with us.

Value for money

“By this I mean that you never quite know what you will find in their written responses but the depth and variety of the experiences Panellists write about are invaluable. Recently we have explored friendship and also donor conception. On both occasions we used the MOP as part of a mixed methods approach, for example combined with in-depth interviews or focus groups with other samples of respondents. The written responses, we have found, add another dimension to research findings gleaned through other methods. I am quite convinced that the MOP gives sociological research access to ‘parts that other methods cannot reach’ and this arises largely from the commitment that Panellists have to the Project and their willingness to write in very personal ways.”

Professor Carol Smart, University of Manchester, Darker Side of Friendship Directive 2008, Donor Conception Directive Spring 2011

Strength of narrative

Written narratives are important because they offer a different type of knowledge from face-to-face interviews. There is less dialogue between the researcher and research. This means that the MOP responses, though of course to an extent are shaped by the way the Directive was worded, represent perhaps more closely the agendas of the respondents than interview data would.

Reflection

Respondents have had the opportunity to reflect upon a Directive in their own time and write their response at their own pace. This is clearly reflected in the quality of many of the responses which tend to be in-depth and reflexive.

Comparative analysis

“In other research I have found that belonging is a phenomenon that is at times difficult to capture in interviews. It is elusive in that a sense of belonging tends to go unnoticed and can therefore be difficult to talk about on the spot in response to an interview question. The MOP data are offering a valuable insight into belonging but also act as a good point of comparison with other forms of data, mainly interview and survey data.”

Dr Vanessa May, University of Manchester, Belonging Directive, Summer 2010

Spend time with the material

Read as many past Directive questions as you can. This will not only enable you to become accustomed to the open-ended question style, but may also provide you with further research opportunities from past questions that you may not have considered.

Flexibility

“Be prepared to be flexible with the format of your questions, and feel confident in the expertise of the project managers. Not everyone will respond in the way that you hope or think they will, but these responses are often fundamental in reshaping your research. If you are unsure of someone's response to your question, try visiting their responses to past-directives. For example, if your questions were related to attitudes toward homosexuality, you may find clarification of a respondents attitudes in past-directives relating to family, marriage, sex or AIDS.

Enjoy opening the box of responses. It will consume a lot of your time, but will enrich your research immeasurably.”

Owen Emmerson, University of Sussex, Corporal Punishment, Directive Summer 2014