



UNIVERSITY
OF COLOGNE

DIFFERENCES IN TALKING TO SENTENCERS ABOUT EASY STUFF (DECISION-MAKING) & HARD STUFF (INSTITUTIONAL RACISM)

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1.

DO I KNOW WHAT I AM
TALKING ABOUT?

MY EXPERIENCE WITH THIS
KIND OF DATA

Research Experience & Data Collection

- imprisonment for fine–default, North Rhine–Westphalia, 2011–2013
 - 6 group discussions: 12 judicial officers, 14 social workers
- drug trade inside prisons, 2014–2016
 - interviews: 5 judges, 6 prosecutors, 8 prison officers, 2 police officers
- calculating the fine
 - 8 group discussions: 21 judges, 33 prosecutors
- institutional racism in courtrooms, 2023–2025
 - interviews: 8 judges, 3 prosecutors, 6 defense lawyers, 5 lawyers in training
 - 1 group discussion: 6 judges

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= EASY
STUFF

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= HARD
STUFF

2.

TALKING ABOUT EASY STUFF

What is Easy Stuff?

- judges/ prosecutors' / decision-makers' field of expertise
 - drug market
- sentencing in a broad term
 - practices and views on day fines

Easy Stuff: 101 on Gainig Access

- use an official logo of your university
- be polite
- accomodate for time constraints and go to their place
- go for smaller places
- still: bring a lot of time
 - get in touch well in advance
 - be aware of different cultures ind different jurisdictions

Easy Stuff: 101 on Managing Power Dynamics & Role Expectations

- interviews – researcher's role
 - well-informed lay person (being a sociologist helps)
 - stick to promised time frame (not longer!)
 - do not confront – listen and analyze later
- focus groups – researcher's role
 - very much the same +
 - make the room “confidential”
 - make clear you are here for things that vary from law

3.

TALKING ABOUT HARD STUFF

What is Hard Stuff?

- things that influence sentencing – but vary from the law
 - everyday theories
 - institutional racism

Hard Stuff: 101 on Gainig Access

- in addition to the Easy.101
 - be perseverant
 - go unusual ways
 - find allies

Easy Stuff:

101 on Managing Power Dynamics & Role Expectations

- questions: draw on other expertise – to show your interest
 - Institutional racism → quant findings
- Configure role of interviewees as
 - expert of their field
 - person observing what is going on in institution („have you witnessed colleagues doing....?“)

4.

**THE MUSIC IS IN THE
SILENCE:
RECONSTRUCTIVE ANALYSIS
IS KEY!**

The music is in the silence: What people say versus what they do

- triangulate data and perspectives
- all is data:
 - way into the field tells you things
 - untold stories
 - intentionally unanswered questions
- use reconstructive methods

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