

Random Probes of GSS Questions

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At the top of the list of the biggest problems facing survey research James A. Davis (1987; S178) mentioned:

Validity: What do the questions mean? We know respondents answer surprisingly reliably and carefully, but we do not really know what they mean when they tell us about "communism" or "happiness"

Indeed there is reason to wonder whether a true meeting of minds goes on between social science investigators and surveymiths at one end and the respondents at the other end. Certainly the crafting of questions that capture the intent of the investigators in a way that is understood by respondents is the goal of all survey research. Often this shared communication and common understanding is less than perfect

however. Several researchers have pointed out that a great deal of misunderstanding and miscommunication can occur in typical survey exchanges between interviewer and respondent (Belson, 1981; Clark and Schober, 1990). Fee (1979, 1981), for example, has shown that abstract words in common use in the mass media often mean very different things to different people. "Big government," for example, tapped four major definitional clusters: 1) welfare statism, 2) corporatism, 3) federal control vs. state's rights, and 4) bureaucracy. Similarly Smith (1981) found that "confidence" was defined in four distinct ways as 1) trust 2) capability, 3) attention to the common good, and 4) following respondent's self interest.

Likewise, since the same word can conjure up notably different meanings, it is not surprising to find that similar words designed to tap the same object or feeling state can actually serve as quite different stimuli and trigger significantly different response patterns. For example, researchers in the quality of life area have found that different terms used to measure psychological well-being, such as "satisfied" and "happy", do not capture the same underlying dimension. Most believe that psychological well-being consists of two distinct dimensions, one affective and the other cognitive and that happiness taps the former more while satisfaction is oriented towards the latter. As a result not only do distributions differ, but trends and associations between measures vary (Andrews and McKennel, 1980; McKennel, 1978; Rodgers and Converse, 1975; McKennel and Andrews, 1980). Similarly, Smith (1987) found that "welfare" and "poor" trigger dramatically different reactions from respondents.

Generally the most effective way of establishing whether sharing meaning exists between investigators and the respondents is a direct, open-ended probe of understanding [Endnote 1]. This technique has been used since the beginning of survey research for the development of items on a pretest either using a traditional pretest approach (Payne, 1951; Converse and Presser, 1986) or the newer cognitive interview pretesting (Jobe and Mingay, 1989; Willis, Royston, and Bercini, forthcoming; and Mingay and Greenwell, 1989), in main surveys themselves (Converse, 1987), and in post-survey experiments designed to explain previously discovered findings and patterns (Cantril, 1947; Belson, 1981; Schuman and Bobo, 1988).

Among this array of approaches is the random probe developed by Howard Schuman (Schuman, 1966; Schuman and Hackett, 1974; Converse and Presser, 1986). Under the random probe technique

random sub-samples of respondents are asked open-ended follow-up questions to a sample of closed attitude questions. These probes ask respondents to explain or elaborate on the closed-ended choice that they had just given. The recorded responses are then used by the investigator to obtain a more complete and in-depth understanding of the closed question and in particular to ascertain whether the closed question was understood by the respondent as the investigator has intended. By asking only a random sub-sample of respondents (around 50) about each closed question, it is possible to understand how that item worked without going to the great expense of asking open-ended follow-ups of all respondents. This feature permits the investigator to collect probes on many questions in the survey rather than having complete information from all respondents on only a few questions. In Schuman's original study each respondent was asked about a random 10 of the survey's 200 questions.

The disadvantages are that the relatively small sub-sample size could easily underestimate or exaggerate a particular theme and that the open-ended material can not be utilized in the quantitative data analysis since too few respondents answer any particular question. Despite these drawbacks, we find the technique to be useful and agree with Schuman (1966) that "the survey researcher has an opportunity to increase his own sensitivity to what his questions mean to actual respondents, and thereby, improve his comprehension of the resulting data."

Random Probes of GSS Questions

At Schuman's suggestion the General Social Survey (GSS) incorporated random probes on the 1984 survey. (The GSS has conducted annual cross-sectional surveys of adult Americans since 1972, except for 1979 and 1981. It is funded by the National Science Foundation and conducted by the National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago. For details on the survey see Davis and Smith, 1988.) Each respondent was asked to explain his previous answer to one of 25 questions. About 55-65 respondents answered each probe. The 25 questions were selected randomly from GSS attitude items with two restrictions. We generally excluded items that were asked only of sub-populations (e.g. employed people) because the number of random probes would have been reduced to low levels and avoided items in the middle of explicit scales with a common introduction in order not to interrupt the flow of the question. With these exceptions the items are typical of GSS attitude items asked in 1984. The questions covered and the

probes utilized as given in Appendix 1. The probed questions are identified by their GSS mnemonics in Appendix 1 as well as in the text and tables for cross-reference and identification purposes. Except for the specialized follow-ups used for Qs. 77 and 98, we used general, non-directives probes as Schuman had.

For example, after the question on approval of homosexuality ("What about sexual relations about two adults of the same sex--do you think it is always wrong, almost always wrong, wrong only sometimes, or not wrong at all?"), the interviewer inquired, "Could you tell me a little more about that?" Some verbatim responses were:

I don't like it, but I do think people are entitled to their own preference. X I don't think it's normal, but may be for them it is.

If they were born from the beginning like that, e.g. my son, I would try to help. It's not what we were put here for.

Because in the Bible, it states that all homosexuals would not go to heaven. It's in 1st Corinthians, Chapter 6. It's just unnatural, that's all.

I could not imagine another woman touching me. It's not natural.

In administering the random probe interviewers were instructed to repeat the probe to either clarify the initial answer or to obtain a fuller response. In general at least one probe per response would be standard. An "X" was to be inserted in the text to indicate a follow-up probe (see first example cited above). The interviewers were to record all remarks verbatim.

The responses to the random probes are then evaluated in several different ways including 1) the Schuman scheme of predicting closed responses, 2) a consideration of non-attitudes, 3) an evaluation of the amount of validity or shared meaning between interviewer and respondent, and 4) a discussion of substantive insight into topics.

Predicting Closed Responses from Random Probes

Following Schuman's procedures, the first analysis of the random probes we carried out was to try to predict the closed responses that respondents had given based on their open-ended answer. The evaluation scheme was the same as used by Schuman and is reproduced below:

Code	Interpretation	Points
A.	Explanation is quite clear and leads to accurate prediction of closed choice.	1
B.	Explanation of marginal clarity and leads to accurate prediction of closed choice.	2
C.	Explanation very unclear; cannot make any prediction about closed choice	4
D.	(a) Explanation seems clear, but leads to wrong prediction of closed choice; (b) Respondent was unable to give any explanation of his closed choice ("don't know"); (c) Respondent in course of explanation shifted his closed choice away from original.	5
(R)	(Explanation is simply literal repetition of closed choice; cannot judge respondent understanding of question.)	(omit)

These categories are obviously highly subjective and would likely vary among coders. All of the questions were coded by a research assistant and 12 of the questions were independently coded in whole or in part by the author. Agreement was over 90%. In addition the author individually reviewed the research assistant's assignment for all cases and questions and made changes when disagreements occurred. In addition, this coding approach is not all encompassing. It evaluates whether the response to the random probe leads to successful prediction of the prior closed response

and does not directly consider whether shared meaning exists between the interviewer and the respondent. Such an evaluation is carried out latter.

The results of this evaluation are given in Table 1. Overall our estimates of what the respondent had replied to the closed questions agreed with the actual closed responses 87% of the time across all questions, no prediction was possible for 6%, wrong predictions happened for 4%, and respondents gave no explanation for 3%. The agreement level of 87% and the mean value of 1.4 were both exactly what Schuman found in his study [Endnote 2]. There was considerable range in the accuracy of the predictions from correct predictions of over 95% for national service for men and the regulation of pornography, down to only 55% for the political ideology question.

If anything, the level of incorrect and not possible scores exaggerates the problems found for the closed questions. First, many of our wrong predictions resulted from the fact that respondents were explaining why they weren't in another category, rather why they were in the category they selected. Examples are given in the discussion of the "problematic" happiness item below. Second, it was often hard to predict what position people had selected when the closed choices were more than simple dichotomies. While it was almost always clear that a person agreed with the closed question, we were sometimes unsure if they had strongly agreed or only agreed. Third, respondents sometimes gave clear reasons that could be interpreted as supportive of either side of the issue. For example, on the afraid to walk alone at night question, one fearful respondent noted, "Well, it's very quiet and there are not too many people on the street." A fearless respondent noted, "It's a very quiet neighborhood. Nothing has ever happened around here." Knowing how these two respondent answered the fear question makes clear what they meant. One is concerned about deserted streets with only criminals lurking around, while to the other the quiet streets were deserted of criminals as well as others. However, without knowing their prior response, one might have assumed that they had expressed the same level of fear for the same reason. Fourth, sometimes the references were too cryptic, often referring to personal experiences that was not clearly explained. For example, on the Communism as a form of government question, one respondent said, "Because that's the way I feel. I was there once." Another remarked, "I see it working in some countries. I've been raised to fear communism as evil and I

saw my Dad's face." In the first case we don't know what country the respondent visited or whether his reactions to the unspecified country were positive or negative. In the second case, we don't know what was seen on the father's face. Such potentially important, but unclear references, made assignment difficult. Finally, people who replied "no opinion/don't know" to the closed questions were also probed and their responses were often difficult to correctly match because some a) simply repeated that they didn't know, b) gave pros and cons, and c) tried to explain why they didn't know. In sum, numerous of the impossible to code or wrongly predicted answers resulted from difficulties in understanding the meaning of explanations, but not because their explanations contradicted their closed response or indicted a substantial misunderstanding of the closed item.

These reasons caused many of the mismatches even for items that ranked extremely low in correct predictions: social class, women in the armed forces, happiness, and political ideology.

For social class, which asked people "Why do you consider yourself a member of the _____ class?", the problem was that many people responded in such general terms as "income" and "education". These terms are certain objectively relevant to class identification. The only problem was that respondents often didn't say enough about their income or educational level to permit us to predict what class had been mentioned. There seems therefore to be little problem with understanding and appropriate references, but a merely an articulation difficulty.

As with social class, the problem with the item on having more or less women in the armed forces is not one of understanding. Respondents mention such reasons as equality, the numerical underrepresentation of women at 9%, the desirability of women serving-except for combat, and other arguments. However, it was often hard to gauge from their comments if they favored more or less women. For example, the references to combat exclusion were made by people both for and against more women. Also, a number of wrong predictions were made because of counter-arguing. People who we judged as favoring fewer women actually had said that the current level was about right. They were explaining why they thought more weren't needed and not (as we assumed) why less were desirable (e.g. "Shouldn't have too many women - it's just not the place they should be.").

Happiness tied for second highest on wrong predictions and was also second highest on correct, but less clear predictions. The most common reason for wrong predictions and lack of clarity was interpreting explanations for why they weren't "very happy", as reasons for being "not very happy." For example, one respondent explained "I didn't really want to be in the navy. If I had grown up with money, my goals would have been going to college. I don't really like being in the navy." Similarly, another explained "Going through divorce, plant closing, and adapting to new life." We thought both were "not very happy", the lowest response. But both rated themselves as "pretty happy". It is possible to argue that their happiness self-ratings are too positive given these stories and that this is the source of our mis-classifications. Other happiness explanations however suggest that what these people were doing was explaining why they didn't say they were "very happy". They were stressing the negative because they thought that they had to tell why they weren't happy, possibility due to a cultural positivity bias (Smith, 1979). Again the problem is not that people misunderstood the question or even that they gave a response that didn't match their explanation (although that could be argued), but that they were explaining why they weren't something.

Only the bottom item on the list, self-identified political ideology on a seven-point liberal/conservative scale, indicated substantial problems with the understanding question. With only 52% of response clearly and correctly classified, this item had the highest level of no explanation, the second highest amount of no prediction, and a slightly higher than average number of wrong predictions. Many people had difficulty explaining why they were liberal, moderate, or conservative. A few made general references to supporting change (n=3) or backing the status quo (5) and a larger number (n=13) cited their position on a specific issue or two. A number however stressed that it was difficult to summarize their spectrum of beliefs into one label (n=6) and others merely repeated the terms "liberal" or "conservative" without defining them in any way (n=8). Others could only refer to a "gut feeling" or state "Because I am..." to the probe. Clearly both the all-encompassing and abstract, ideological nature of this question made it a difficult one for many respondents. This finding is neither surprising nor new, since in-depth exploration of political ideology have highlighted similar difficulties over the years (Converse, 1964; Conover and Feldman, 1981).

Nonattitudes

It has frequently been argued (Converse, 1964; Smith, 1981), that many people express opinions on questions that they either do not understand or for which have had no prior, informed attitude. They are rather nonattitude holders manufacturing attitudes for the interviewer. The open-ended random probes might detect these nonattitude holders, since they would presumably have difficulty in explaining or elaborating on their contentless opinions. On one hand, the preceding analysis suggests that this was not often the case, since the vast majority of respondents were able to give answers to the random probes that were consistent with and permitted the correct prediction of their previously expressed opinions. On the other hand, many responses were hardly good examples of informed and developed argumentation. As the research assistant who coded the open-ended probes, noted, "Respondents seemed to be much more stupid and less inclined to think for themselves that I had expected. If they didn't know why they answered a question the way they did, they seemed to explain with cliches... They don't seem to think about the question long enough and only repeat what they hear on TV or what their spouse has told them. Perhaps this is the way people really are or perhaps they feel pressured to come up with what they think the interviewer wants to hear." Her assessment comes close to that of Converse, people have very little behind their opinion, grasp at some slim reeds to hold on to, and may be trying to please the interviewer. (This student is a foreign language major who had never heard of Converse's nonattitudes theory before coding this material.)

But I differ from her characterization of the materials somewhat and question the conclusion that the responses indicate widespread nonattitudes. First, there is considerable range in the quality and depth the answers. They range from a few "I don't know" to similarly rare examples of extensive and detailed explanations running 50-100 words in length. Most answers are a single sentence of a dozen words or so. In my own wholly subjective judgment, I'd say that about a quarter of the responses were brief or incomplete enough to perhaps be considered problematic. A few examples to such responses are given below:

A. Extra-marital Sex Always Wrong (XMARSEX)

"According to my religious [sic] and upbringing it is wrong."

"That's the way I was brought up. That's what I believe."

"Woman should stay with their [sic] own man, that's the way it's supposed to be."

B. Communism Worst Form of Government (COMMUN)

"I DK. X They take away all your freedoms. X So different from us. X No."

"I don't care for Communism."

"No real comment on that. No freedom."

C. Outlaw Pornography (PORNLAU)

"Because I don't think pornography is worthwhile."

"Because it's the ruination of the country. It's just filth."

"I don't know. X It's just sickening. It's not the way it should be. It's man made stuff."

It might be possible to interpret these as stumbling attempts to explain the nearly unexplainable (i.e. nonattitudes). In most cases I suspect that this would be a misinterpretation. While many responses are not terribly articulate, they are overwhelmingly relevant. Respondents were not answering essay examinations in a college course, but were rather doing what they were asked to do, elaborate on their previous response. The limited nature of some of their responses is more a function of 1) the non-demanding nature of the task they were doing (giving a little explanation, not filing an amicus brief in defense of their position) and 2) the inarticulateness of many people (who may not be cognitively prepared to or experienced in verbally expressing their thoughts and reasoning)[Endnote3]. We do not feel that the random probe responses that are short, vague, or even stumbling and sketchy are necessarily indicators of either liable nonattitudes or unreliability.

Validity: Unshared Meaning

While there appears to have been a great deal of common or

shared meaning between the investigators and respondents, the match between intentions and interpretations is not perfect. Investigators typically want items to tap one dimension, but language is rarely so precise or unambiguous as to preclude alternative understandings (Clark and Schober, 1990). Also life is so complex that all individual circumstances can not be covered by a simple question. Suppose an investigator wanted to measure personal access to an automobile and asked "Do you own a car?" Sounds simple and straightforward, doesn't it? But consider just some of the problems:

- 1) No. (Respondent's wife owns the car.)
- 2) No. (Respondent leases a car.)
- 3) No. (Respondent owns a truck, jeep, etc.)
- 4) No. (Respondent's store owns a car.)
- 5) Yes. (A junked car that hasn't run in years)
- 6) Yes. (Car on permanent loan to child living out of state.)
- 7) Yes. (But neither R nor anyone else in the household drives.)

Now given just precisely how the investigator meant to define "personal access to an automobile," some of the above answers might be correct, but most are probably wrong. Of course one might argue that this is just a bad question and a good pretest would have revealed these errors and permitted the investigator to formulate a more precise question, perhaps like the following:

Do you or another adult in your immediate household own or lease on a long-term basis a car, truck, or similar motor vehicle?

IF YES:

Is it in running order?

Is it available for daily use by members of your immediate

household?

IF NO:

Do you drive a car, truck or similar motor vehicle that is owned by your own business, office, or farm?

This revised question largely plugs the leaks in the initial question, but at the cost of becoming long and complicated. And of course it doesn't eliminate all potential misunderstandings. For some people may count a tractor or a ATV as a "similar motor vehicle." Is that what the investigator would want? Would some salespersons for large corporations count the company car as owned by "your own business . ." ? Would taxi drivers say "yes" to this follow-up? Again the investigator could elaborate and specify his intent, but the question would become more and more complex. While repeated refinements and clarification should ultimately be able to cover most reasonable interpretations and common place circumstances, total, perfect closure is not possible. Nor is it necessarily either needed or desirable. If access to an automobile is the sole focus of an investigator, then numerous follow-ups and fine distinctions are highly desirable. If automobile access is one of many questions about either material possessions or access to various modes of transportation, then less depth, detail, and yes, accuracy might be acceptable since every question about automobiles would usually cost another questions about other matters (e.g., about other possessions or modes of transportation).

Overall, the degree of shared meaning between the investigators and respondents was very high. On a number of questions however small numbers of respondents interpreted the question in a different manner from that intended. Below we discuss these validity problems, indicating the different understandings that some people put on the question. In all cases, the number with fundamentally variant perspective are small.

1. Afraid to Walk Alone at Night (FEAR)

This question is intended to measure personal fear of crime, but does not explicitly refer to crime. Several people made no mention of criminal concerns in their responses, referring instead to being too old (1), to it being too dark (1), and to loose dogs and a highway (1). Some of these respondents may

have had crime in mind (e.g., the darkness may be a source of fear because it hides criminals), but it appears that these respondents did not primarily think of crime when answering this question.

2. Care of Parents in their Children's Home (AGED)

This question is intended to measure attitudes towards the care of elderly parents by their children rather than through institutionalization. Some respondents thought, however, that it referred to adult children living with (and off of) their parents (1 solely, 2 partly, and 2 uncertain).

3. Special Treatment for Blacks (HELPBLK)

This question is based on the implicit assumption that Blacks are behind Whites in living standards. This assumption is rejected by some respondents (4) and they therefore oppose special treatment as not objectively needed.

4. Punishments for Failing to Register for Draft (COPUNISH)

This question asks whether those who refuse to register for the draft "should be punished in any way." People seem to assume that the punishment would be quite severe (e.g., Yes - "But jail is too harsh.", No - "They shouldn't be killed if they don't want to register.", No - "Don't see why they should be punished for such a minor thing, with murderers walking the streets free."). Several people (2) who replied No actually suggested punishments (e.g., "They should not receive loans for schooling."), perhaps thinking these did not count as punishments (i.e., "punished in any way"). (On the difficulty of respondents handling generalized absolutes see Smith, 1981.)

In each of these examples at least a few people (always less than 10%), put a different interpretation on the question than the investigator intended, rejected a common set of assumptions, or gave a term a different meaning. While this does not mean that all other respondents understood the questions exactly as intended, no evidence of other substantial misunderstandings appears in their responses. It therefore appears that respondents not only can

explain their responses, but overwhelmingly understood the questions as the investigators did.

Insights

Perhaps the greatest value of random probes is the insights they provide into what arguments and factors shaped respondents' opinions. Ideas about what beliefs and attitudes should be studied to either understand the topic more fully or to explain why particular positions are held can be reaped by the random probes. These insights are substantive and we will not carry out an in-depth analysis of all questions, but will highlight a few examples to illustrate the insights that random probes can supply [Endnote 4].

1. Afraid to Walk Alone at Night (FEAR)

While this question has no racial references in it, a number of people (6) mentioned race in their responses (4) with negative connotations and (2) neutrally. This suggests that race is an important enough aspect of crime attitudes to be explored directly.

2. Adultery (XMARSEX)

Most opponents of extra-marital affairs made an explicit religious reference (12) or a reference to immorality/sin (3). This suggests that appropriate religious variables should be used in any model explaining attitudes towards extra-marital sex.

3. Work if Rich (RICHWORK)

While most people say that they would continue working, many people report substantial changes would be made, such as switching to different jobs (5) or working only part time (2). To get a more detailed characterization of how people might react to being freed from the material necessity of work, one might explicitly include these as follow-ups for those who would continue working or as options along with continuing to work full-time in present job.

4. National Service (MESERVE)

People emphasized different advantages of national service: some stressed citizenship and patriotism (7), others saw it as beneficial to the young themselves (25), while to still others it was the gain to the old and/or needy that was positive (3). Among those stressing the benefits to the young some thought providing a job was important, while others saw national service as an instrument for teaching responsibility. Thus, to understand support for national service one would have to explore these (as well as other) aspects.

5. Integrated Schools (RACSCHOL)

This question was originally framed (in 1942) to get at dual-school systems and is now intended to tap support for the principle of integration. The importance of the neighborhood school/busing issue is shown by the fact that many of those who favored integration added that they opposed busing (3) or favored neighborhood schools (5). Thus, any more detailed exploration of school integration should clearly address these aspects.

6. Taxation (TAX)

Most respondents said their taxes were too high. Relatively few however emphasized the high absolute level of taxes or their own personal financial burden (4). Instead most mentioned the unfairness and inequity (14) and some mentioned wasteful utilization (3). Thus fairness and efficiency rather than personal burden might be explored more in a study of attitudes towards taxes.

In sum, the above examples show the potential for random probes to enrich an analysis and in particular to suggest either other variables to be introduced into the analysis or themes to be tapped in future studies.

Conclusion

Overwhelmingly for the questions probed on the 1984 GSS, a

meeting of the minds existed between investigators and respondents. For most questions the vast majority of respondents understood the queries as the investigators intended and were able to give relevant, if not always articulate and voluminous, explanations of their attitudes. Self-identified political ideology on a liberal/conservative scale was clearly the most problematic question examined, a finding consistent with previous research. The random probes, thus, did not reveal widespread miscommunication indicating invalid measurement. This suggests that many of the linguistic barriers to shared understanding that are so well-documented by survey methodologists (Schuman and Presser, 1981) and linguists (Clark and Schober, 1990) do not in fact usually block successful and meaningful communication between respondents and interviewers.

Random probes did, however, greatly enrich our understanding of the themes involved in and factors influencing attitudes. As Lazarsfeld (1944) recommended back in the early years of survey research, open-ended inquiries should be used along side of closed questions, especially in an extensive developmental phase when structured surveys are being designed. Unfortunately this sage advise is too often either ignored or given short shrift.

Random probes are a technique that can help to redress that oversight. They can be used to check the validity of items, to gauge the content of opinions, and to explore factors and themes influencing attitudes. In particular, given the advent of CATI and the coming of CAPI, random probes can be used more easily and more precisely than ever before. Randomization can not only be automatically implemented, but the probes can also be tailored to prior responses and particular aspects of the questions under scrutiny. For example, take three items with high inter-item correlations and a simple, unidimensional association such as represented by a Guttman scale. A CATI/CAPI random probe might take a one in 20 sample of respondents who give response patterns consistent with the Guttman scale, but take a 100% sample of the relatively small number of off-scale respondents. Such an approach might uncover sub-group validity problems, suggest special factors or reasonings that led to scale inconsistent responses, or perhaps detect nonattitudes or other measurement problems. Similarly, random probes could be varied to include both the type of general, non-directive queries used here, as well as specific queries about particular phrases in the question or leading probes that asked if

certain factors or arguments were considered or how certain conflicting factors were weighed. In brief, the power and flexibility of CATI/CAPI could enhance and extend the value and utility of random probes.

Except for the long smoldering political ideology question, the random probes on the GSS found no smoking guns. They are, however, an excellent tool to ferret out understanding problems where they exist. Their chief value however is probably in providing insight into the cognitive and affective basis of attitudes and in detecting lines of investigation to more fully explain and model attitudes.

Table 1

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*****
Questions                Evaluations of Explanations (a)
                          Correct      Correct but      No           No Explanation  Simple
                          and Clear   less Clear      Prediction   or Wrong       Repetition
                          N(b)
*****
National
Service for
Men
(MESERVE)(c)      96.2%      0.0      3.8      0.0      0.0      53/55

Legalization
of Pornography
(PORNLAW)        90.6%      7.5      1.9      0.0      0.0      53/54

Approval of
Homosexuality
(HOMOSEX)        90.6%      1.9      3.8      3.8      0.0      53/55

Payment of
Taxes (TAX)      90.0%      8.3      0.0      1.7      0.0      60/61

Obligation to
Serve on Jury
(OBJURY)         87.5%      1.8      5.4      1.8      3.6      56/57
    
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Punish Draft Resisters (COPUNISH)	87.5%	1.8	3.6	3.6	3.6	56/60
Fear of Crime (FEAR)	87.5%	4.7	4.7	3.1	0.0	64/64
Govt Help Poor (HELPPOOR)	87.3%	1.6	1.6	4.8	4.8	63/71
Govt Help Sick (HELPSICK)	86.9%	3.3	3.3	6.6	0.0	61/64
Legalization of Marijuana (GRASS)	86.3%	6.8	4.1	1.4	1.4	73/76

Table 1 -- continued

Questions	Evaluations of Explanations(a)					N(b)
	Correct and Clear	Correct but less Clear	No Prediction Possible	No Explanation or Wrong Prediction	Simple Repetition of Question	

School Desegregation (RACSCHOL)	85.7%	6.1	4.1	4.1	0.0	49/54
Care of Elderly Parents (AGED)	84.7%	5.1	6.8	1.7	1.7	59/59
Communism as Form of Govt (COMMUN)	83.0%	1.9	11.3	0.0	3.8	53/55
Anomia-Children (ANOMIA6)	82.8%	3.4	6.9	6.9	0.0	29/62(d)
Military Job Training (JOBTRAIN)	81.8%	7.3	1.8	3.6	5.4	55/59

Work If Rich (RICHWORK)	81.1%	16.2	2.7	0.0	0.0	37/38(e)
Approval of Adultery (XMARSEX)	80.0%	8.3	5.0	6.7	0.0	60/62
Govt Help Blacks (HELPLBLK)	78.9%	7.0	3.5	10.5	0.0	57/61
Govt Regulation (HELPNOT)	76.7%	0.0	6.7	3.3	13.4	60/63
Equalize Wealth (EQWLTH)	75.9%	9.3	9.3	5.6	0.0	54/55

Table 1 -- continued

Questions	Evaluations of Explanations(a)					N(b)
	Correct and Clear	Correct but less Clear	No Prediction Possible	No Explanation or Wrong Prediction	Simple Repetition of Question	
Happiness (HAPPY)	69.0%	13.8	5.2	8.6	3.4	58/63
More/Less Women In Armed Forces (FENUMOK)	62.1%	8.6	13.8	8.6	6.8	58/60
Social Class (CLASS)	51.9%	16.7	24.1	5.5	1.9	54/55
Political Ideology (POLVIEWS)	51.7%	3.4	20.7	6.9	17.2	58/58

- (a) Based on Schuman, 1966.
- (b) First number is number of cases on which percentages were based. Second Number includes cases with no answer to the explanation prompt.
- (c) GSS mnemonics as used in Davis and Smith, 1988.
- (d) Many interviewers skipped 4B and asked 48 instead because they misread the instructions
- (e) Because they are not currently employed 22 cases were correctly skipped for this question.

Appendix 1

A. Random Probe Questions
(Main Questionnaire)

Circle the question number and probe question referred to on your HEF label.
Mark "RP" next to the question in the questionnaire as a reminder.

Question Response	Probe Question	Probe Question for "DON'T KNOW"
4 B	I see, why do you say that?	I see, why do you say that?
23	Could you tell me a little more about that?	Why is that--Why do you have no opinion on that?
34	I see, why do you say that?	I see, why do you say that?
35	I see, why do you say that?	I see, why do you say that?
43	I see, why do you say that?	I see, why do you say that?
48	I see, why do you say that?	I see, why do you say that?
69	Could you tell me a little more	Why is that--Why do you have no opinion on that?
77	Why do you consider yourself a member of the _____ class?	_____
81	Could you tell me a little more about that?	Why is that--Why do you have no opinion on that?
82	Could you tell me a little more about that?	Why is that--Why do you have no opinion on that?
96	Could you tell me a little more	Why is that--Why do you have no

	about that?	opinion on that?
97	Could you tell me a little more about that?	Why is that--Why do you have no opinion on that?
98	Which has been more important to you personally?	_____
104	I see, why do you say that?	I see, why do you say that?
106	Could you tell me a little more about that?	Why is that--Why do you have no opinion on that?
108	Could you tell me a little more about that?	Why is that--Why do you have opinion on that?
109	I see, why do you say that?	I see, why do you say that?
110	I see, why do you say that?	I see, why do you say that?
111	I see, why do you say that?	I see, why do you say that?
112	I see, why do you say that?	I see, why do you say that?

MAS RANDOM PROBES: SEE INSIDE COVER OF MAS QUESTIONNAIRE

B. Probed Questions (Main Questionnaire)

4. Now I'm going to read you several statements. Some people agree with a statement, others disagree. As I read each one, tell me whether you more or less agree with it, or more or less disagree.

B. It's hardly fair to bring a child into the world the way things look for the future. (ANOMIA6)

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REFER TO Q.20.  IF R IS CURRENTLY . . .
. . . WORKING, TEMPORARILY NOT WORKING, OR UNEMPLOYED;: ASK Q.
          |
. . . LAID OFF, KEEPING HOUSE, RETIRED, IN SCHOOL, OR "OTHER":: SKIP
          |
          TO INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE Q.24.
    
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82. Do you think White students and (Black/Negro) students should go to the same schools or to separate schools? (RACSCHOL)

Turning to another topic: There's been a lot of discussion about the way morals and attitudes about sex are changing in this country.

96. What is your opinion about a married person having sexual relations with someone other than the marriage partner--is it always wrong, almost always wrong, wrong only sometimes, or not wrong at all? (XMARSEX)
97. What about sexual relations between two adults of the same sex--do you think it is always wrong, almost always wrong, wrong only sometimes, or not wrong at all? (HOMOSEX)
98. Some people say that people get ahead by their own hard work; others say that lucky breaks or help from other people are more important.

Which do you think is most important? (GETAHEAD)

Hard work most important	1
HARD WORK LUCK EQUALLY IMPORTANT	2
Luck or help from other people most important	3
DON'T KNOW	8

104. Which of these statements comes closest to your feelings about pornography laws? READ FIRST THREE CATEGORIES [(a) - (c)] ONLY. CIRCLE ONLY ONE CODE. (PORNLAW)

- (a) There should be laws against the distribution of pornography, whatever the age 1
- (b) There should be laws against the distribution of pornography to persons under 18 2

(c)	There should be no laws forbidding the distribution of pornography	3
	DON'T KNOW	8

106. Do you consider the amount of federal income tax which you have to pay as too high, about right, or too low? (TAX)

108. We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. I'm going to show you a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal--point 1--to extremely conservative--point 7. Where would you place yourself on this scale? (POLVIEWS)

(1)	Extremely liberal	01
(2)	Liberal	02
(3)	Slightly liberal	03
(4)	Moderate, middle of the road	04
(5)	Slightly conservative	05
(6)	Conservative	06
(7)	Extremely conservative	07
	DON'T KNOW	98

109. I'd like to talk with you about issues some people tell us are important. Please look at CARD P. Some people think that the government in Washington should do everything possible to improve the standard of living of all poor Americans; they are at Point 1 on this card. Other people think it is not the government's responsibility, and that each person should take care of himself; they are at Point 5. (HELPPPOOR)

I strongly agree the government should improve living

I agree with both

I strongly agree that people should take care of

standards	answers	themselves'	
			DON'T KNOW
1_____2_____3_____4_____5			8

A. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you made up your mind on this?

FOR Q'S 109 THROUGH 112: IF RESPONDENT HAS NOT MADE UP HIS/HER MIND ON AN ISSUE, CODE "DON'T KNOW." THIS IS AN ACCEPTABLE RESPONSE. DO NOT PROBE.

110. Now look at CARD Q. Some people think that the government in Washington is trying to do too many things that should be left to individuals and private businesses. Others disagree and think that the government should do even more to solve our country's problems. Still others have opinions somewhere in between. (HELPNOT)

I strongly agree that the govern- ment should do more	I agree with both answers	I strongly agree that the govern- ment is doing too much	
			DON'T KNOW
1_____2_____3_____4_____5			8

A. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you made up your mind on this?

111. Look are CARD R. In general, some people think that it is the responsibility of the government in Washington to see to it that people have help in paying for doctors and hospital bills.

Others think that these matters are not the responsibility of the federal government and that people should take care of these things themselves. (HELPSICK)

I strongly agree that the government should do more

I agree with both answers

I strongly agree that the government is doing too much



A. Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you made up your mind on this?

112. Now look at CARD S. Some people think that (Blacks/Negroes) have been discriminated against for so long that the government has a special obligation to help improve their living standards. Others believe that the government should not be giving treatment to (Blacks/Negroes). (HELPBLK)

I strongly agree that the government should do more

I agree with both answers

I strongly agree that the government is doing too much



C. Random Probes and Probed Questions (Military Supplement)

Circle the question number and probe question referred to on your HEF label. Mark "RP" next to the question in the questionnaire as a remainder. DON'T KNOW" responses asked the same question.

Probe Questions	Question
1A	I see, why do you say that?
4A	I see, why do you say that?
8	I see, why do you say that?
11	I see, why do you say that?
20C	I see, why do you say that?

The first of these is . . .

1. A. How would you feel about a program that required all young men to give one year of service to the nation--either in the military or in non-military work such as in hospitals or with elderly people? Would you strongly favor it, probably favor it, probably oppose it, or strongly oppose it? (MESERVE)

4. A. At the present time, about 9 percent of the armed forces are women. All things considered, do you think there are too many women in the armed forces, about the right number, or should there be more women in the armed forces? (FENUMOK)

8. Even though they are no longer drafted for military service, young men are still required by law to register for the draft when they become 18 years old. If a young man refused to register for the draft, do you think he should be punished in any way? (COPUNISH)

11. Most people in the Armed Forces are taught skills they can use in civilian jobs later. But some don't get such training. They are taught only combat skills. Do you think the Armed Forces have an obligation to train everybody in service for civilian jobs later, or is that not a responsibility of the Armed Forces? (JOBTRAIN)

20. And one last question. We all know that American citizens have certain rights. For example, they have the right to free public education and to police protection, the right to attend religious services of their choice, and the right to elect public officials. I'd like to ask now about certain obligations that some people feel American citizens owe their country. I just want your own opinion on these-whether you fee it is a very important obligation, a somewhat important obligation, or not an obligation that a citizen owes to the country. (READ EACH STATEMENT AND CIRCLE ONE CODE FOR EACH.)

C. How about serving on a jury if called? (OBJURY)

ENDNOTES

1. Among the many other techniques that can help to determine shared meaning, as well as measure other properties, are multi-item scaling, knowledge questions, general comprehension evaluations by interviewers, question specific comprehension evaluation by interviewers, and have-you-heard/read-about filters. On the limitations of open probes, see Zeisel, 1985, pp. 186-191.
2. This agreement is surprising given that his sample was from East Pakistan and involved entirely different questions.
3. Consider two deeply felt and concretely held attitudes. One results from a careful explicit consideration of the pros and cons of an issue. So when asked about support for capital punishment, the death penalty advocate can cite concerns about the rising murder rate, a belief in a deterrent effect, Biblical support for the death penalty, etc., while an opponent might cite

racial bias in its application, how it's wrong to play God, the possibility of a mistake being made, etc.

The second attitude has not been cognitively addressed (either ever or not recently), being possibly based on childhood socialization or emotional response. Thus, a person opposed to homosexuality may only be able to say that it's wrong or immoral without any further elaboration. This defense may seem less articulate and thus more like a non-attitude, being manufactured on the spur of the moment, when actually it is just the opposite, a deeply held attitude with high test/retest reliability that has been held a long time and comes from basic beliefs and childhood upbringing. For example, how does one explain why blue is their favorite color? Some may be able to offer concrete explanations (e.g., because it goes with my skin tones best or because it makes me think of the sea which I enjoy greatly), but many probably could not offer an explicit explanation, saying perhaps only that they liked it or that they have always thought of it as prettiest. In fact, the more basic and primordial the affect towards an object may be, the less possible it may be for one to offer an explicit, cognitive justification.

4. For an excellent example see Schuman and Hatchett, 1974.

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