


# WELCOME TO:



**Reconsidering Hard-to-Survey  
Populations, Representativity &  
Representation in Surveys**



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# TODAY'S PRESENTER



**Mariel Leonard**

Survey Methodologist & Researcher at the German  
Center for Integration & Migration Research (DeZIM)



# Reconsidering Hard-to-Survey Populations, Representativity, & Representation in Surveys

AAPOR Webinar March 2023

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# AGENDA

## Part 1: Theory

- What do we mean when we say “hard-to-survey” populations?
- Why should we include demographic subgroups in research?

## Part 2: Practice

- What methods are available for surveying demographic subgroups?
- What are some practical considerations and lessons learned?
- Where do we go from here?

# LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participants will learn and understand:

1. Ways in which demographic subgroups may be considered hard-to-survey

2. Available methods for surveying demographic subgroups

3. Practical considerations for including demographic subgroup in survey research



# MY EXPERIENCE

Cognitive testing for the US Census, Veteran's Affairs (Westat)

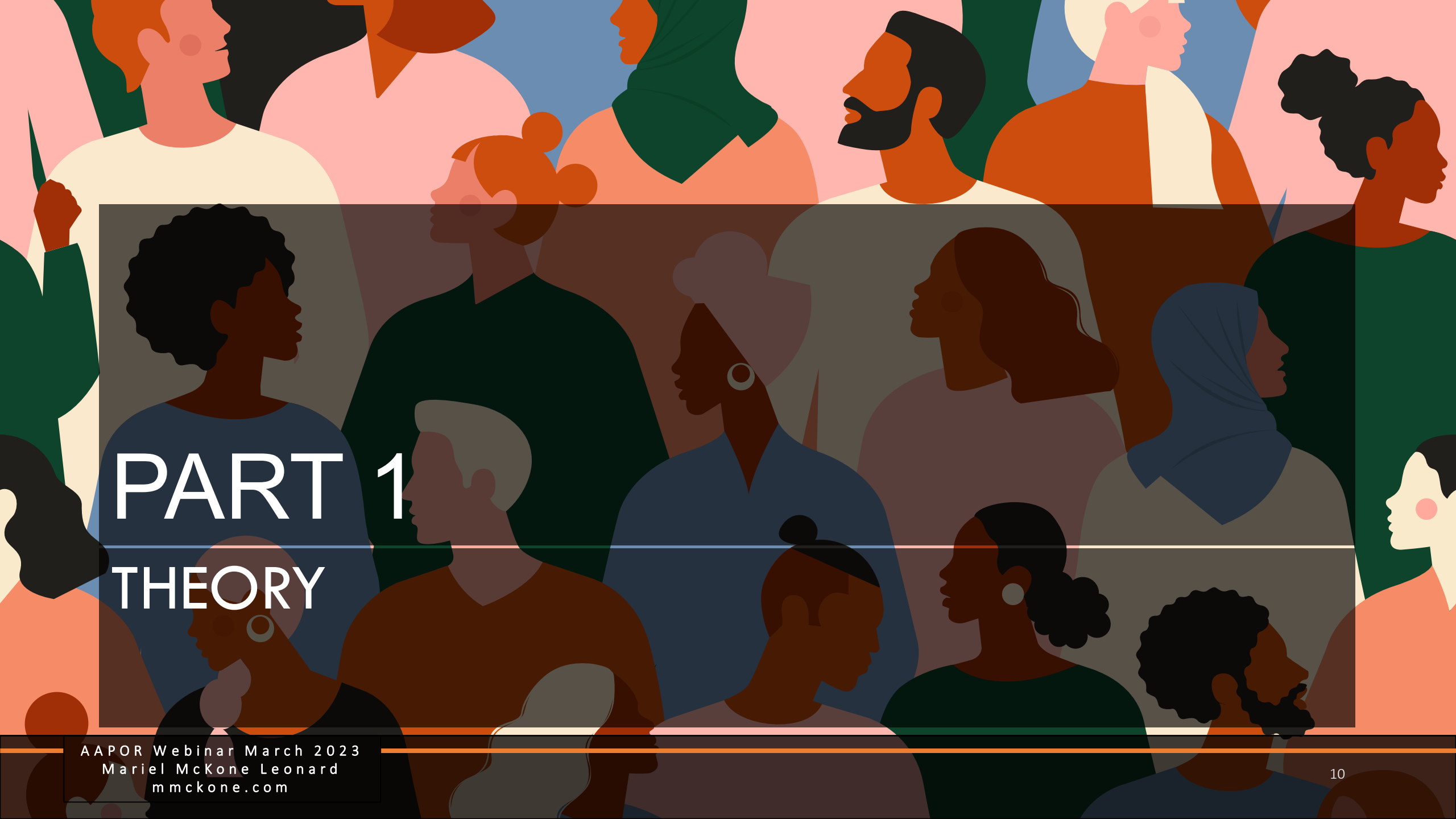
Life in Germany (MZES)

Interviewer Quality of Life Study (IQLS)

Beyond Onomastic (DeZIM)

Black and Afro-Germans RDS (DeZIM)

Transatlantic Privacy Perceptions (TAPP) Panel (UMD/ LMU)



# PART 1

## THEORY



# WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “HARD-TO-SURVEY” POPULATIONS?

	Tourangeau et al. (2014)	Willis et al. (2014)*
Populations, groups, or individuals can be HARD TO...	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Select</b>
... if they require more time/ effort/ resources to include than the “average” general population respondent	<b>Identify (Screen)</b>	
	<b>Reach (Locate, Contact)</b>	<b>Recruit</b>
	<b>Persuade</b>	
	<b>Interview</b>	<b>Interview</b>

\* Introduction to the JOS special issue Surveying the Hard-to-Reach, Vol. 30, No. 2

# CONTEXTS & POPULATIONS CONSIDERED “HARD-TO-SURVEY”

Racial minorities  
Immigrant populations  
Indigenous populations  
Highly mobile and migrant populations  
Homeless and refugee populations  
Sexual minorities  
Populations affected by natural disasters  
Populations in zones of armed conflict  
Stigmatized populations

Willis et al. (2014)

# “HARD-TO-SELECT” POPULATIONS

- Hard-to-sample IF
  - No sampling frame exists OR
  - Sampling frames cannot be constructed OR
  - Implementing sampling with a frame would be prohibitively resource-intensive
- Hard-to-identify IF
  - Population is difficult to define (inclusion/exclusion criteria) OR
  - Individuals are motivated to misreport group membership (stigma, vulnerability)

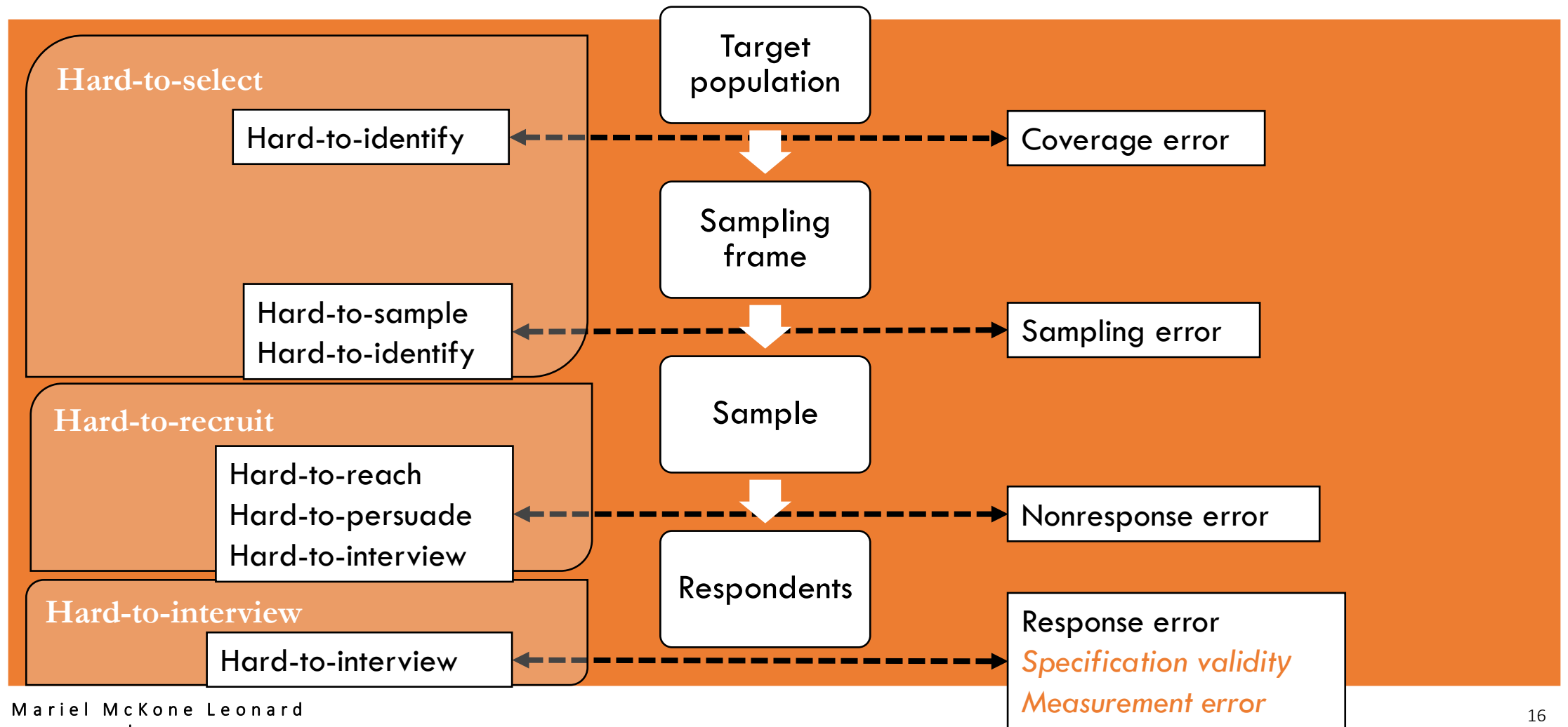
# “HARD-TO-RECRUIT” POPULATIONS

- Hard-to-reach IF
  - Population is highly mobile (nomadic or itinerant groups, displaced persons, college students) OR
  - Behind significant barriers to contact (gatekeepers, call screening, unreliable internet/cell signal)
- Hard-to-persuade IF
  - Population is busy (elites) OR
  - Population has low trust (socially isolated, vulnerable)

# “HARD-TO-INTERVIEW” POPULATIONS

- Hard-to-interview IF
  - Population has cognitive or physical impairments which may require additional resources/ adaptations to the survey mode OR
  - Population is particularly vulnerable, requiring explicit consent from a gatekeeper (prisoners, children) OR
  - Population has limited literacy or language skills in the language of survey administration

# HARD-TO-SURVEY GROUPS WITHIN THE TSE FRAMEWORK





# REVISITING “HARD-TO-SURVEY” POPULATIONS

2014

9 YEARS LATER...

2023



- # of groups of interest has increased
- # of people affected has increased
  - 2015 “Long Summer”, 10 years of the Syrian war, departure of US from Afghanistan, war in Ukraine, climate refugees, political radicalization
- Reliability/ Utility of traditional probability sampling methods has decreased
- Increases in availability/ use of even basic mobile devices
  - Even vulnerable populations may be willing and able to participate in digital data collection (Sugie 2018, Keusch et al. 2019)
- Diversity, equity, & inclusion movement
- Decolonialization of sciences and methods

# RECONSIDERING “HARD-TO-SURVEY” POPULATIONS

- Racial minorities
- Immigrant populations
- Indigenous populations
- Highly mobile and migrant populations
- Homeless and refugee populations
- Sexual minorities
- Populations affected by natural disasters
- Populations in zones of armed conflict
- Stigmatized populations

## QUESTION FOR CHAT:

What *groups* and what *kinds of groups* are missing from the list?

# THOUGHTS ON TERMINOLOGY

- *Hard-to-survey for whom? And with what methods?*
  - No survey is “easy”; “hard-to-survey” more accurately means “*harder-to-survey*” (Aljadeeah 2022)
  - Research, nonresponse mitigation (often) assumes “us” vs “them”

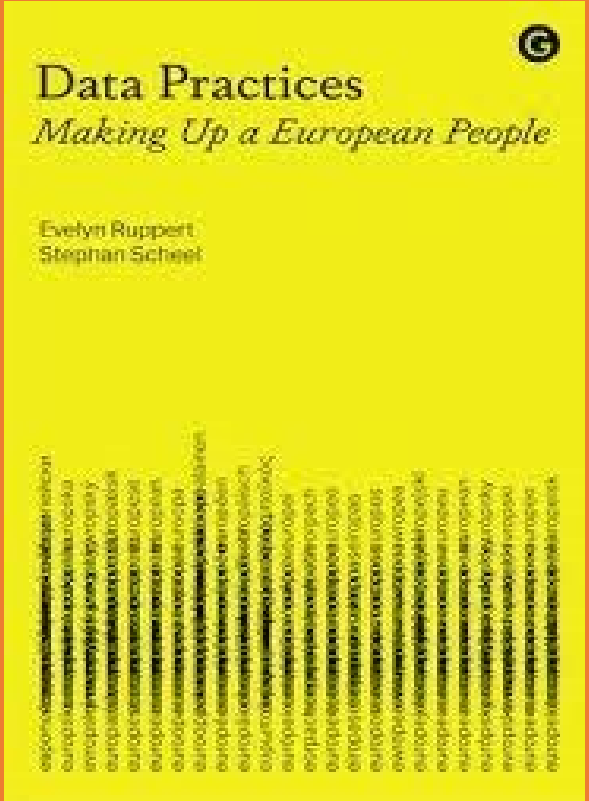
Respondents “don’t know what’s good for them” and must be “cajol[ed] and coax[ed]... into responding” (Stoop 2005:101)

Higher resource requirements + Adversarial approach → EXCLUSION

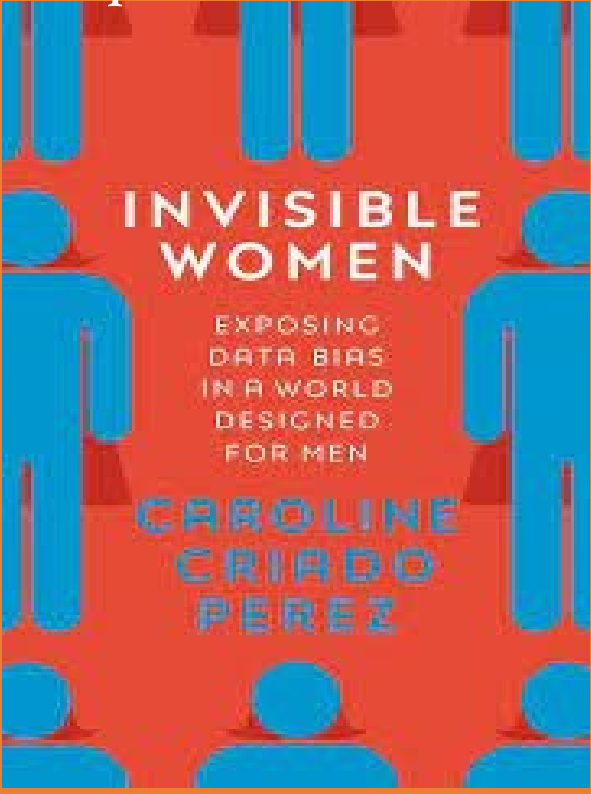


# WHO COUNTS...

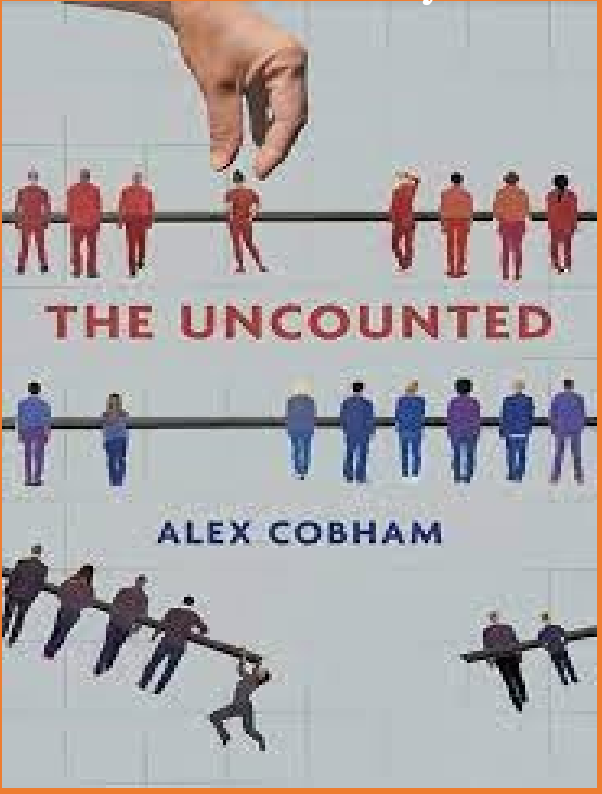
...as a citizen?



...as a person?



...as someone worthy?





# WHY INCLUDE DEMOGRAPHIC SUBGROUPS IN RESEARCH?

- 1. Ethical reasons
  - Moral imperative
  - Research ethics

Representation

- 2. Methodological reasons
  - Innovation
  - Reduce error & bias

Representativity

- 3. Scientific reasons
  - Validity
  - Value

Representation + Representativity



# PART 2

## PRACTICE

# WHAT METHODS ARE AVAILABLE FOR SURVEYING DEMOGRAPHIC SUBGROUPS?

- Methods of selecting

- Methods of recruiting

- Methods of interviewing

QUESTION FOR CHAT:

What demographic subgroups do you work with?

# SELECTING DEMOGRAPHIC SUBGROUPS

## SAMPLING

- Community-based sampling
- Internet sampling
- List sampling
- Multi-stage sampling
- Network-based sampling
- Time-location sampling

## SCREENING

- Onomastic preclassification
- Respondent self-identification



# RECRUITING DEMOGRAPHIC SUBGROUPS

## REACHING (Locating, Contacting)

- Area mapping
- Community outreach
- Ethnographic research
- Media advertisement

## PERSUADING

- Increasing/ emphasizing topic saliency
- Reducing risk of exposure/ harm
- Refusal conversion

# INTERVIEWING DEMOGRAPHIC SUBGROUPS

- Proxy interviewing
- Accessible language
- Translation/ construct equivalency
- Multimodal surveying

# METHODS OF SURVEYING DEMOGRAPHIC SUBGROUPS

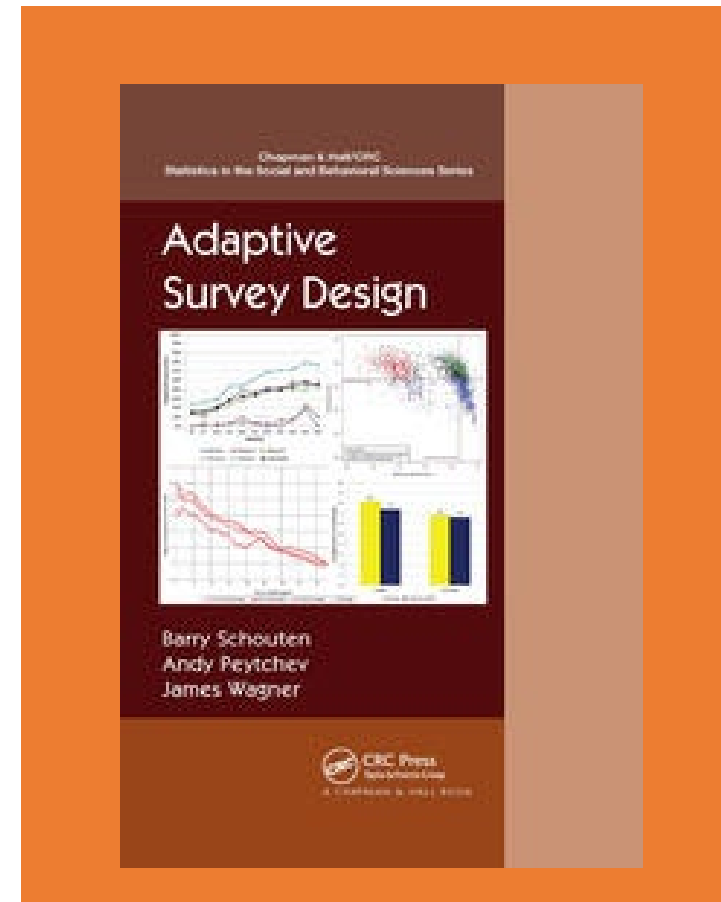
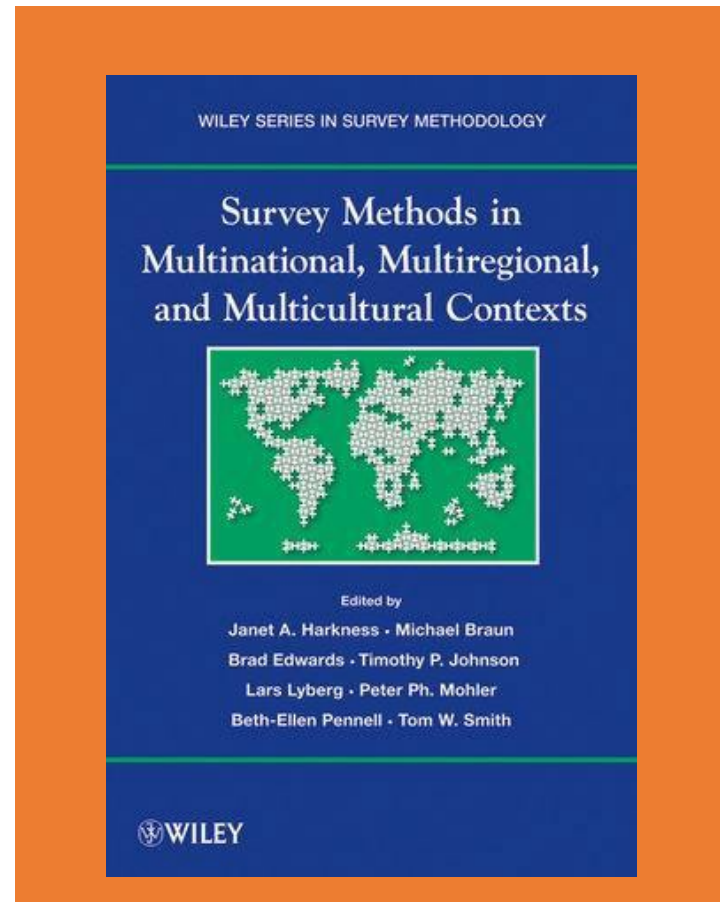
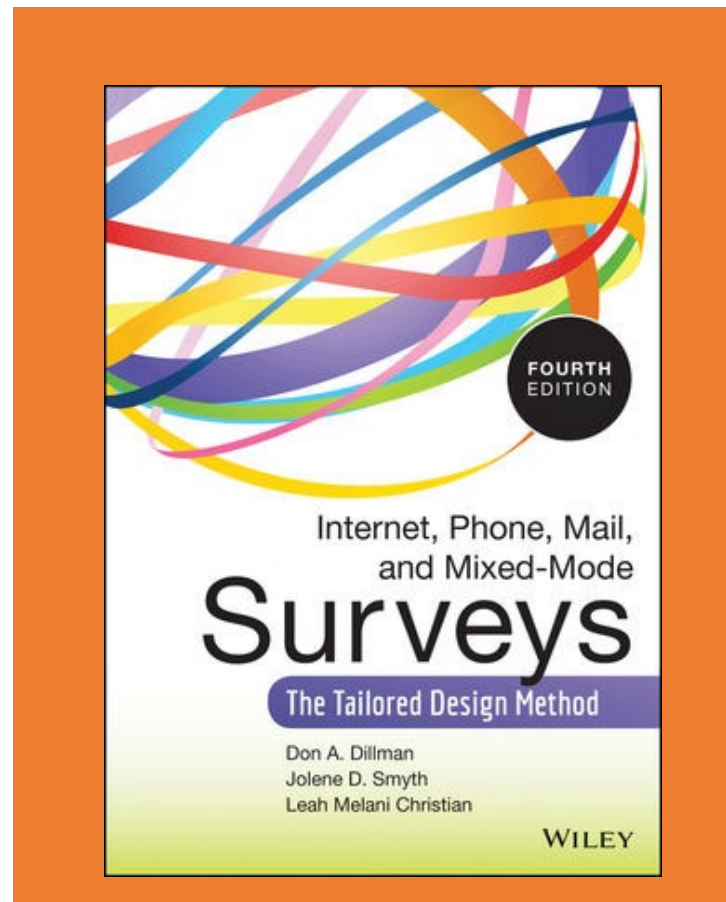
- Literature focuses on sampling and locating demographic subgroups
  - Must find individuals before surveying/ interviewing

BUT...

Do we need different methods for all demographic subgroups?

- Tourangeau et al. (2014)
  - 7 chapters on selecting (sampling and screening)
  - 8 chapters on recruiting (locating, contacting, persuading)
  - 3 chapters on interviewing
- JOS Special Issue (2014)
  - 7 articles on selecting (sampling and screening)
  - 5 articles on recruiting (locating, contacting, persuading)
  - 1 article on interviewing

# METHODS OF SURVEYING DEMOGRAPHIC SUBGROUPS



LEARNING OBJECTIVE 2

# WHAT ARE SOME PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS & LESSONS LEARNED?

- Demographic subgroups are not homogenous; all individuals have their own response propensity
  - People can be members of multiple subgroups simultaneously (intersectionality)
  - Addressing one methodological challenge does not resolve all methodological challenges
  - Challenges are often interconnected and must be addressed simultaneously



# WHAT ELSE HAVE WE LEARNED SO FAR?

- “Hard-to-survey” label is not *objective*; only *relative* to “average” general population member
  - Based on assumptions that (often) no longer hold true
  - All populations, all demographic subgroups are special and challenging in their own way
- Maybe we don’t need more methods we just need more inclusive methods (which starts with inclusive thinking)

# CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED IN MY WORK

	Sampling	Identify	Reach	Persuade	Interview
Syrian refugees in Germany			X	X	X
Survey interviewers	X		X		
Portuguese Germans	X	X	X	X	X
Afghan refugees in Turkey	X	X	X	X	X
Afro-Germans	X	X	X	X	X
Privacy experts	X	X	X	X	

LEARNING OBJECTIVE 3



# LESSONS LEARNED FROM MY WORK

- Special sampling methods most important when group is rare (less than 10% Kalton & Anderson 1986) or has no clear definition
- How to define and screen group members → BIG gap in literature
  - Definition is also a problem with elite groups – Who is a privacy expert? Who is an influencer?
- Community trust in surveying institution is essential
  - Access to funds or a mandate to conduct research is not sufficient



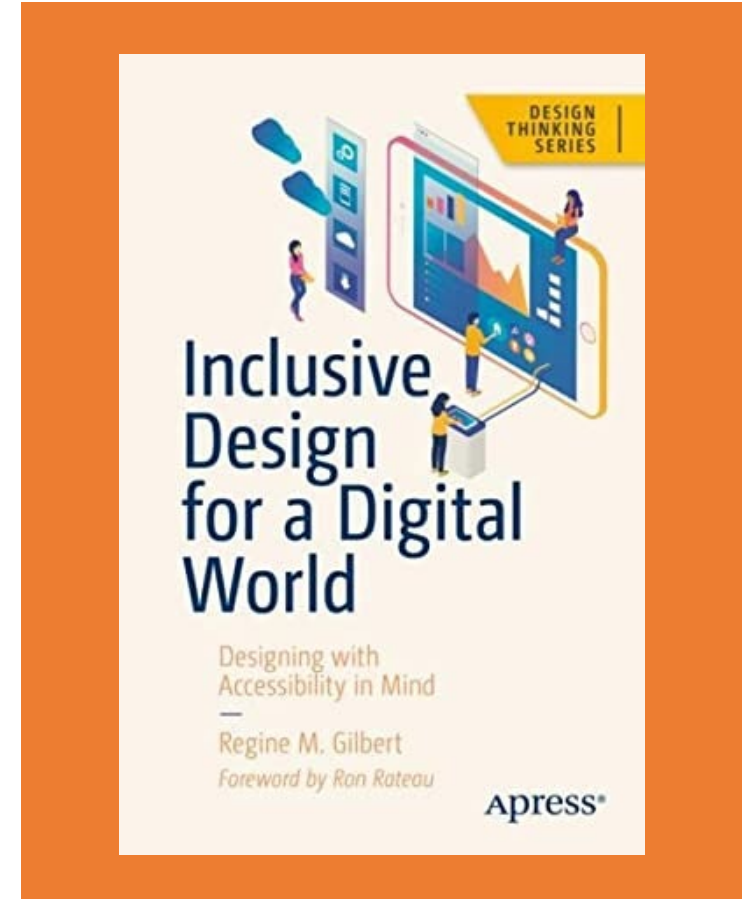
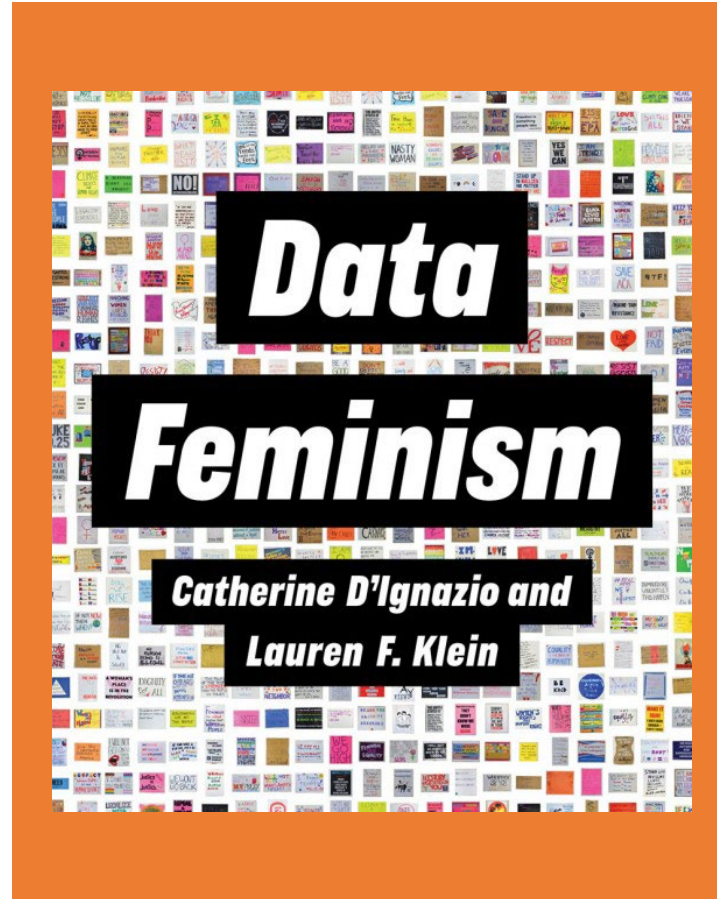
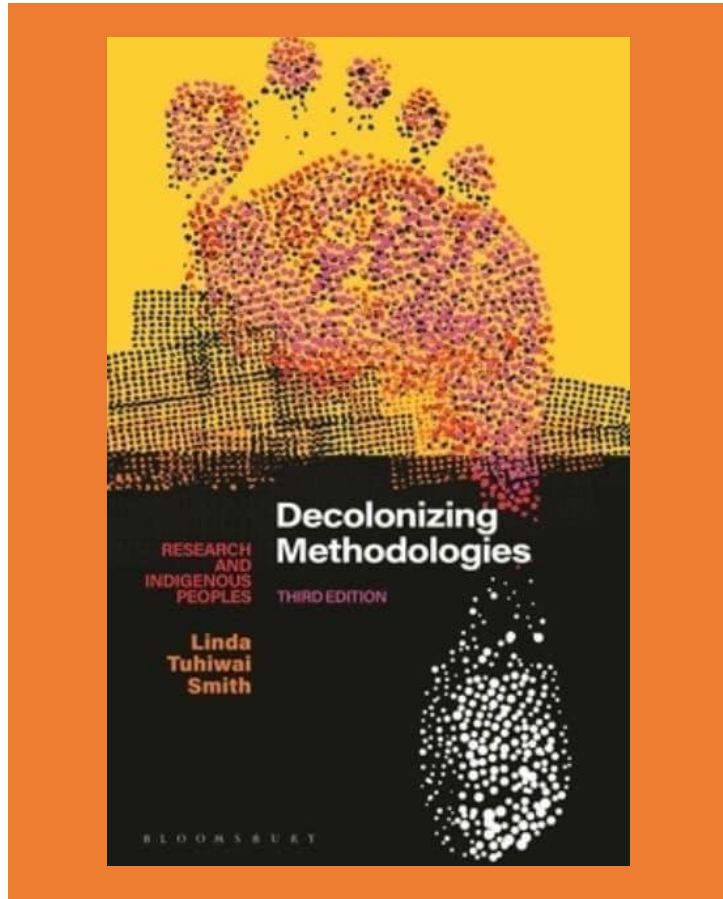
# WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

- Making survey methods & research more inclusive

- Addressing gaps in the literature

- Open questions for future research

# MAKING SURVEY METHODS & RESEARCH MORE INCLUSIVE



# GAPS IN THE LITERATURE

- “Hard-to-define” populations
  - “People subjected to racial discrimination”
  - Ethnic or racial subgroups in non-Anglo countries
- Burden and emotional labor of interviewing rare, hard to locate, & vulnerable groups

# OPEN QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- Do we need different methods for different demographic subgroups?
- What can be learned from multinational, multiregional, and multicultural (3MC) methods and how can they be applied to cultural and linguistic minority populations?

# OPEN QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- How to address the gap between representativity and representation?
- How to combine multiple non-probability samples, particularly in the absence of appropriate samples for weighting?
  - Census-based samples often suffer from small cell sizes; privacy concerns affect data availability



# THANK YOU!

Questions? Email me at:  
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# A1: GETTING STARTED SURVEYING DEMOGRAPHIC SUBGROUPS

Methodological challenge		Resources
General issues, specific populations		Tourangeau et al. (2014) chs. 2-8, 11-15, 17-18, 26-27; JOS pp. 177-189
Selecting	Sampling	Tourangeau et al. (2014) chs. 12, 19-22; JOS pp. 191-213, 277-289 RDS: Tourangeau et al. (2014) chs. 19, 21, 23-24; JOS pp. 291-310
	Screening	Tourangeau et al. (2014) chs. 12, 19; JOS pp. 231-249
Recruiting	Locating	Tourangeau et al. (2014) chs. 6-10, 30; JOS pp. 191-229, 251-275, 311-334
	Contacting	Tourangeau et al. (2014) chs. 6-7, 12, 15, 27, 30; JOS pp. 355-379
	Persuading	Tourangeau et al. (2014) chs. 17-18, 25, 29, 30; JOS pp. 335-354 Tailored Survey Design (e.g., Dillman et al., 2014)
Interviewing	Interviewing	Tourangeau et al. (2014) chs. 6-7, 12, 14-16, 27-28; JOS pp. 355-379 Tailored Survey Design (e.g., Dillman et al., 2014) Multinational, Multiregional, and Multicultural (3MC) methods