

Memo on quoting and citing your own Interviews

This is something that doesn't seem to be standardized, and is hard to find in style guides. But do start by looking in the style guide for the style you have chosen to use for your thesis (ie, Chicago Manual of Style). If there is nothing in there, here is my recommendation:

Usually, people in sociology do not cite interviews as they do secondary sources, especially if the research is mainly based on qualitative interviews. In the methods section, you will have explained about your interviews, including the types of people interviewed. If you use pseudonyms, the first time you use one, you should include a footnote saying that this and all other names are pseudonyms. If you have some interviews with public figures whose identities you've decided not to conceal, then say that at that point as well. If all interviews use real names, it is probably best to explicitly state that in a footnote also.

Generally, you want to introduce interview quotes in the text in as ethnographic a way possible. Give the pseudonym and some other relevant details about the person. For example:

Xiao Chen, a young taxi driver, told me, "<quote>."

Mrs. Lu is a professor in her fifties and head of the Manjusri Study Group. She described her inspiration for starting the group thus,

<block quote>

The one instance in which I usually cite interviews is when the interview is with a secondary source or "key informant," such as an academic or expert, and I am trying to establish a "fact" that isn't in a published source. In this case, I am not concealing the identity of the source. They are not talking about themselves. In that case, I would use an in-text citation (Zhang 2007) and a bibliographic entry: Zhang, Yuxie. Interview by author. (or sometimes "personal communication") October 12, 2007. Nanjing, PR China.

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I discussed this question with the other instructors of the thesis workshop, and Nicole Newendorp had some further/ slightly contrasting suggestions. Please see the comments below.

"Just a quick note on my part: although in my own work I cite interviews exactly as you suggest below, I have begun telling students that they may want to cite each interview in their theses. That is, they can note the day and location of the interview, or cite it simply as "interviewee 4, March 12, 2013," or something along those lines. One reason I started suggesting that students cite their interviews is because they might well end up with a reader who is less familiar with sociological and anthropological citation conventions and might question the fact that they haven't provided a citation for each interview quote they mention. Particularly in this period of concern over academic integrity, it seems better to err on the side of over-caution. Another reason I started suggesting this approach is because it seems to make students feel more comfortable--as in they have something more concrete to offer as evidence rather than just a quote. (I get a number of questions each about students who say: how does someone know you didn't just make it up?) A third is because I found that journals I was submitting articles to for publication were also requesting that I cite each interview.

Of course, there isn't one correct answer to this citation question, but I add my experience as food for

thought along with Alison's helpful comments."

While I stand by my original comments that what I suggested is the current standard in my field, it can't hurt to provide additional citation for peace of mind. Here are the particular styles I'd recommend:

If you are using foot/end notes for your citations:

Xiao Chen, a young taxi driver, told me, "<quote>." (1)

in notes: (1) Xiao Chen (pseudonym). Interview by author. February 3, 2008. Nanjing, China.

If you are using in-text parenthetical citations:

Xiao Chen, a young taxi driver, told me, "<quote>." (Chen Interview, 2008)

And then in the bibliography:

Chen, Xiao (pseudonym). Interview by author. February 3, 2008. Nanjing, China.

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One final note on the question of citing your primary source interviews, in response to a question from one of you about how to actually incorporate these into the bibliography.

When including interviews in a bibliography, there are two ways of handling this and either is fine. You can just treat them like any other source and mix them in alphabetically. Or, you can have a separate section of your bibliography for interviews - you might also include primary textual sources you've cited (for example, documents and websites produced by the organization/ movement/ etc) in there and have it be a "primary source" section instead of an "interview" section. As I said earlier, in sociology people don't usually formally cite interviews in this way, so I can't say I've seen many (any?) examples of this. But it is not uncommon in historical and other fields to have subsections of a bibliography for, say, primary sources, or sources in different languages, etc. I'd personally lean towards the separate section for Primary Sources approach if you are going to formally cite things.