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## Interviewing

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### *The Art of Science*

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*Andrea Fontana & James H. Frey*

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If all the problems of question wording could be traced to a single source, their common origin would probably prove to be in taking too much for granted.

—S. Payne, *The Art of Asking Questions*, 1951

◆ Asking questions and getting answers is a much harder task than it may seem at first. The spoken or written word has always a residue of ambiguity, no matter how carefully we word the questions and report or code the answers. Yet, interviewing is one of the most common and most powerful ways we use to try to understand our fellow human beings. Interviewing is a paramount part of sociology, because interviewing is interaction and sociology is the study of interaction (see Benney & Hughes, 1956). Thus the interview becomes both the tool and the object, the art of sociological sociability, an encounter in which “both parties behave as though they are of equal status for its duration, whether or not this is actually so” (Benney & Hughes, 1956, p. 142).

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Interviewing has a wide variety of forms and a multiplicity of uses. The most common type of interviewing is individual, face-to-face verbal interchange, but it can also take the form of face-to-face group interviewing, mailed or self-administered questionnaires, and telephone surveys. Interviewing can be structured, semistructured, or unstructured. It can be used for marketing purposes, to gather political opinions, for therapeutic reasons, or to produce data for academic analysis. It can be used for the purpose of measurement or its scope can be the understanding of an individual or a group perspective. An interview can be a one-time, brief exchange, say five minutes over the telephone, or it can take place over multiple, lengthy sessions, sometimes spanning days, as in life-history interviewing.

In this chapter we briefly outline the history of interviewing before turning to a discussion of the academic uses of interviewing. Although the focus of this volume is qualitative methodology, in order to illustrate the full import of interviewing we need to discuss the major types of interviewing—structured, group, and unstructured—as well as other ways to conduct interviews. Next, we address in detail the various elements of qualitative interviewing. We then discuss some problems of gender as it relates to interviewing, as well as issues of interpretation and reporting. Finally, we broach some considerations related to ethical issues.

### ◆ The History of Interviewing

Some form or another of interviewing has been with us for a very long time, as even ancient Egyptians conducted censuses of their population (Babbie, 1992). In recent times, the tradition of interviewing has been twofold. Interviewing found great popularity and widespread use in clinical diagnosis and counseling, where the concern was on the quality of the response, and later, during World War I, interviewing came to be widely employed in psychological testing, with an emphasis on measurement (Maccoby & Maccoby, 1954).

The individual generally credited with being the first to develop a social survey relying on interviewing was Charles Booth (see Converse, 1987). In 1886, Booth embarked on a comprehensive survey of the economic and social conditions of the people of London; this survey was later published as *Life and Labour of the People in London* (1902-1903). In this early study, Booth embodied what were to become separate interviewing methods; he

not only implemented surveys on unstructured interviewing

The data were checked on streets and homes, and by leaders. From time to time not known, so that he could live and habits of the people

Many other surveys were patterned after Booth's example. Among others, an 1885 study done in London (see Converse, 1987). Booth's lead, the American population of Philadelphia towns followed; most notably Lynd's *Middletown* (1929).

Opinion polling was a place well before the turn of the century. In 1935 with the founding of the Gallup Poll by George Gallup. Preceding in the 1920s there was a movement of attitudes. W.I. Thomas method to introduce the influence, along with that studies at the University of the works of the Chicago school are reputed to have some scholars disagree that studies lacked the analysis thus are, at best, "first hand." Regardless of the correctness, relied on a combination of interviews in their studies. work of Thrasher (1927), on about 130 qualitative whose classic study of home

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forms and a multiplicity of uses. The individual, face-to-face verbal interview, face-to-face group interviewing, mail, and telephone surveys. Interviews can be structured, or unstructured. It can be used to collect political opinions, for therapeutic purposes, or for social analysis. It can be used for the understanding of an individual. An interview can be a one-time, brief interview, or it can take place over a period of time, spanning days, as in life-history

The history of interviewing before the 19th century. Although the history of interviewing, in order to illustrate the full range of the major types of interviewing—the structured, the unstructured, as well as other ways to conduct interviews—the various elements of qualitative research, the problems of gender as it relates to interviewing, and reporting. Finally, we will discuss technical issues.

has been with us for a very long time. The use of censuses of their population and the evolution of interviewing has been a long and widespread use in clinical research. The concern was on the quality of the data. The use of interviewing came to be widely used, and an emphasis on measurement

being the first to develop a social survey. See Booth (see Converse, 1987). The first survey of the economic and social conditions of this survey was later published in 1902-1903. In this early study, the use of separate interviewing methods; he

not only implemented survey research but triangulated his work by relying on unstructured interviews and ethnographic observations

The data were checked and supplemented by visits to many neighborhoods, streets and homes, and by conferences with various welfare and community leaders. From time to time Booth lived as a lodger in districts where he was not known, so that he could become more intimately acquainted with the lives and habits of the poorer classes. (Parten, 1950, pp. 6-7)

Many other surveys of London and other English cities followed, patterned after Booth's example. In the United States similar work ensued. Among others, an 1885 study attempted to do in Chicago what Booth had done in London (see Converse, 1987) and, in 1896, admittedly following Booth's lead, the American sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois studied the black population of Philadelphia (see Du Bois, 1899). Surveys of cities and small towns followed; most notable among them were R. S. Lynd and H. M. Lynd's *Middletown* (1929) and *Middletown in Transition* (1937).

Opinion polling was another early form of interviewing. Some took place well before the turn of the century, but this form really came into its own in 1935 with the founding of the American Institute of Public Opinion by George Gallup. Preceding Gallup, both in psychology and in sociology, in the 1920s there was a movement toward the study (and usually measurement) of attitudes. W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki used the documentary method to introduce the study of attitudes in social psychology. Thomas's influence, along with that of Robert Park, sparked a number of community studies at the University of Chicago that came to be known collectively as the works of the Chicago school. Although researchers from the Chicago school are reputed to have used the ethnographic method in their inquiries, some scholars disagree and have noted that many of the Chicago school studies lacked the analytic component of modern-day ethnography and thus are, at best, "first hand descriptive studies" (Harvey, 1987, p. 50). Regardless of the correct label for the Chicagoans' fieldwork, they clearly relied on a combination of observation, personal documents, and informal interviews in their studies. Interviews were especially in evidence in the work of Thrasher (1927), who, in his study of gang members, relied primarily on about 130 qualitative interviews, and in that of Nels Anderson (1923), whose classic study of hoboes relied on informal, in-depth conversations.

While it was left to Howard Becker and Everett Hughes to formalize and give impetus to sociological ethnography in the 1950s and 1960s,

interviewing began to lose both the eclectic flavor given to it by Charles Booth and the qualitative accent of the Chicagoans. Understanding gang members or hoboes through interviews lost importance; what became relevant was the use of interviewing in survey research as a tool to quantify data. This was not new; opinion polls and market research had been doing it for years. But during World War II there was a tremendous increase in survey research, as the U.S. armed forces hired great numbers of sociologists as survey researchers. More than half a million American soldiers were interviewed in one manner or another (Young, 1966), and their mental and emotional lives were reported in a four-volume survey, *Studies in Social Psychology in World War II*. The research for the first two volumes of this study, titled *The American Soldier*, was directed by Samuel Stouffer. This work had tremendous impact and led the way to a widespread use of systematic survey research.

What was new, however, was that quantitative survey research was to move into academia and come to dominate sociology for the next three decades. An Austrian immigrant, Paul Lazarsfeld, spearheaded this move. He welcomed *The American Soldier* with great enthusiasm. In fact, Robert Merton and Lazarsfeld (1950) edited a book of reflections on *The American Soldier*. Lazarsfeld moved to Columbia in 1940, taking with him his market research and other applied grants, and became instrumental in the directing of the Bureau of Applied Social Research. Two other "survey organizations" were also formed: In 1941, Harry Field began the National Opinion Research Center, first at Denver and then at Chicago; and in 1946, Likert and his group founded the Survey Research Center at Michigan.

Academia at the time was dominated by theoretical concerns, and there was some resistance to this applied, numerically based, kind of sociology. Sociologists and other humanists were critical of Lazarsfeld and the other survey researchers. Herbert Blumer, C. Wright Mills, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and Pitirin Sorokin, among others, voiced their displeasure, as reported by Converse (1987):

- ◆ Sorokin: "The new emphasis on quantitative work was obsessive, and he called the new practitioners 'quantophrenics'—with special reference to Stouffer and Lazarsfeld" (p. 253).
- ◆ Mills: "Those in the grip of the methodological inhibition often refuse to say anything about modern society unless it has been through the fine little mill of the Statistical Ritual" (p. 252).
- ◆ Schlesinger: "[They are] social relations hucksters" (p. 253).

But the survey research joined the Survey Center were becoming increasingly growth of survey research texts. Gradually, culminating in 1960s of the American Sociological Association, of survey research continued into the 1990s, although survey research.

Qualitative interview, participant observation, and other methods with a visible scientific rigor than was visible in grounded theory. The emphasis on coding and invariant properties of data in sociology was critical of that interactants act, relying on glosses to the data (Finkel, 1967). Other methods (Lofland, 1971) criticized gathering techniques. One-on-one interview (1980) stressed the importance of observation and ethnography.

Recently, postmodernism has challenged some of the assumptions with the controlling of new directions in qualitative research to the voices and feelings of the interviewer-response of the researcher's gender have come to the fore in the 1980s (Stanfield, 1985). Both membership and understanding must be mentioned that culture (and sports) (Wenner, 1992) or living (or dead but

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But the survey researchers had powerful allies also, such as Merton, who joined the Survey Center at Columbia in 1943, and government monies were becoming increasingly available for survey research. The 1950s saw the growth of survey research in the universities and a proliferation of survey research texts. Gradually, survey research increased its domain over sociology, culminating in 1960 with the election of Lazarsfeld to the presidency of the American Sociological Association. The methodological dominance of survey research continued unabated through the 1970s and 1980s and into the 1990s, although other methods began to erode the prominence of survey research.

Qualitative interviewing continued to be practiced, hand in hand with participant observation methods, but it too assumed some of the quantifiable scientific rigor that so preoccupied survey research. This was especially visible in grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), with its painstaking emphasis on coding data, and in ethnomethodology, with its quest for invariant properties of social action (Cicourel, 1970), albeit ethnomethodology was critical of interviewing and its assumptions, especially the fact that interactants act "as if" they understand each other, while instead relying on glosses to "fill gaps" in understanding (Cicourel, 1964; Garfinkel, 1967). Other qualitative researchers suggested variations. John Lofland (1971) criticized grounded theory for paying little attention to data gathering techniques; Jack Douglas (1985) suggested lengthy, existential one-on-one interviews lasting one or more days; and James Spradley (1980) stressed the importance of sequencing in both ethnographic observation and ethnographic interviewing.

Recently, postmodernist ethnographers have concerned themselves with some of the assumptions and moral problems present in interviewing and with the controlling role of the interviewer. These concerns have led to new directions in qualitative interviewing, focusing on increased attention to the voices and feelings of the respondents (Marcus & Fischer, 1986) and the interviewer-respondent relation (Crapanzano, 1980). The importance of the researcher's gender in interviewing (Gluck & Patai, 1991) has also come to the fore in feminist/postmodernist studies, as has the issue of race (Stanfield, 1985). Both have further problematized concerns about membership and understanding in interviewing. On a less positive note, it must be mentioned that the interview has become a commodity in popular culture (and sports). Thus celebrities such as Bob Dylan and John Lennon (Wenner, 1992) or Charles Barkley (Montville, 1993) become objectified, living (or dead but nostalgic) commodities in a media market.

## ◆ Structured Interviewing

*Structured interviewing* refers to a situation in which an interviewer asks each respondent a series of preestablished questions with a limited set of response categories. There is generally little room for variation in response except where an infrequent open-ended question may be used. The responses are also recorded by the interviewer according to a coding scheme that has already been established by the project director or research supervisor. The interviewer controls the pace of the interview by treating the questionnaire as if it were a theatrical script to be followed in a standardized and straightforward manner. Thus all respondents receive the same set of questions, asked in the same order or sequence, by an interviewer who has been trained to treat every interview situation in a like manner. There is very little flexibility in the way questions are asked or answered in the structured interview setting. Instructions to interviewers often include some of the following guidelines:

- ◆ Never get involved in long explanations of the study; use standard explanation provided by supervisor.
- ◆ Never deviate from the study introduction, sequence of questions, or question wording.
- ◆ Never let another person interrupt the interview; do not let another person answer for the respondent or offer his or her opinions on the question.
- ◆ Never suggest an answer or agree or disagree with an answer. Do not give the respondent any idea of your personal views on the topic of the question or survey.
- ◆ Never interpret the meaning of a question; just repeat the question and give instructions or clarifications that are provided in training or by supervisors.
- ◆ Never improvise, such as by adding answer categories, or make wording changes.

Interviews by telephone, face-to-face interviews in households, intercept interviews in shopping malls and parks, or the interviews generally associated with survey research are most likely to be included in this category.

This interview context calls for the interviewer to play a neutral role, never interjecting his or her opinions of the respondent's answers. The interviewer is to establish what has been called "balanced rapport"; he or she must be, on the one hand, casual and friendly but, on the other hand, directive and impersonal. The interviewer must perfect a style of "inter-

ested listening" that rewards and evaluates the responses (Con-

The guidelines set forth in view, but in practice this does evolve from three sources: (a) gives a "socially desirable" relevant information to him (1983); (b) the type of question wording of the questions; and techniques, or who change (Sudman, & Associates, 1977).

The predetermined nature of minimizing errors. However, structured take place in a social interaction context. As Converse and interview style that fits even means that interviewers must be flexible enough to developments.

It is not enough to understand important to understand to stimulate or retard responses interview proceeds under questions (previously determined under examination) are phrased truthfully. Such an interview overlooks or inadequately

## ◆ Group Interviews

There is a developing form of structured, semistructured popularity among social scientists questioning of several settings (Frey & Fontana, meant to replace individual consideration because it o

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The guidelines set forth above are intended to produce an ideal interview, but in practice this does not happen. Errors occur, and they commonly evolve from three sources: (a) respondent behavior, as when the respondent gives a "socially desirable" response to please the interviewer or omits relevant information to hide something from the interviewer (Bradburn, 1983); (b) the type of questionnaire (face-to-face or telephone) or the wording of the questions; and (c) an interviewer with flawed questioning techniques, or who changes the wording of the interview (Bradburn, Sudman, & Associates, 1979; Frey, 1989; Peneff, 1988).

The predetermined nature of structured interviewing is aimed at minimizing errors. However, structured interviewers are aware that interviews take place in a social interaction context, and they are influenced by that context. As Converse and Schuman (1974) observe, "There is no single interview style that fits every occasion or all respondents" (p. 53). This means that interviewers must be aware of respondent differences and must be flexible enough to make proper adjustments for unanticipated developments.

It is not enough to understand the mechanics of interviewing; it is also important to understand the respondent's world and forces that might stimulate or retard response (Kahn & Cannell, 1957). Still, the structured interview proceeds under a stimulus-response format, assuming that if questions (previously determined to elicit adequate indicators of the variable under examination) are phrased correctly, the respondent will answer them truthfully. Such an interviewing style often elicits rational responses, but it overlooks or inadequately assesses the emotional dimension.

### ◆ Group Interviews

There is a developing form of interviewing that can be implemented in structured, semistructured, or unstructured format and that is gaining some popularity among social scientists. It is the group interview, or the systematic questioning of several individuals simultaneously in formal or informal settings (Frey & Fontana, in press). The use of the group interview is not meant to replace individual interviewing, but it is an option that deserves consideration because it can provide another level of data gathering or a



perspective on the research problem not available through individual interviews.

Group interviewing has ordinarily been associated with marketing research, where the "focus group" has been used for some time to gather consumer opinions on product characteristics, advertising themes, and service delivery. This format has also been used to a considerable extent by political parties and candidates who are interested in voter reactions to issues and policies. The group interview has also been used in sociological research. Bogardus (1926) used groups to test his social distance scale, Zuckerman (1972) interviewed Nobel laureates, Thompson and Demerath (1952) looked at management problems in the military, Morgan and Spanish (1984) studied health issues, and Merton and his associates studied the impact of propaganda using group interviews. In fact, Merton, Fiske, and Kendall (1956) coined the term "focus group" to apply to a situation in which the interviewer asks group members very specific questions about a topic after considerable research has already been completed. There is some evidence that established anthropologists such as Malinowski used this technique, even though it was not reported (Frey & Fontana, 1991). Blumer (1969) also notes the importance of interviewing a select group; he mentions "seeking participants . . . who are acute observers and who are well informed. . . . A small number of such individuals brought together as a discussion and resource group, is more valuable many times over than any representative sample" (p. 41). Blumer (1967) used this method in the Oakland drug study. Today, group interviews in general are generically designated "focus group" interviews, even though there is considerable variation in the natures and types of group interviews.

The group interview is essentially a qualitative data gathering technique that finds the interviewer/moderator directing the interaction and inquiry in a very structured or very unstructured manner, depending on the interview's purpose. For instance, the purpose may be exploratory; the researcher may bring several persons together to test a methodological technique, to try out a definition of a research problem, or to identify key informants. An extension of the exploratory intent is the use of the group interview for the purpose of pretesting questionnaire wording, measurement scales, or other elements of a survey design. This is now quite common in survey research (Desvousges & Frey, 1989). Group interviews can also be used for triangulation (Denzin, 1989b) purposes or employed in conjunction with other data gathering techniques. Finally, phenomenological purposes are served where group interviews are conducted in an

TABLE 2.1 Type of Group

Type	Setting
Focus group	formal-preset
Brainstorming	formal or informal
Nominal/Delphi	formal
Field, natural	informal spontaneous
Field, formal	preset, but in the field

SOURCE: Frey and Fontana (in press).

unstructured way in the interviews on various dimensions.

The skills required of a group interviewer differ from those needed by an individual interviewer. The interviewer must be flexible, objective, empathetic, and able to manage the group. The group does present some challenges. Three specific skills needed are: first, the interviewer must keep one person or a small group; second, he or she must encourage all to participate; and third, he or she must manage the group to ensure the full participation of all. The interviewer must balance the role of moderator, which calls for being interviewed: "The interviewer must be able to manage about the script of questions and to manage the group interaction" (Frey, 1991).

The group interview has many advantages. It is flexible, stimulating to participants, and can be elaborate, over and over again. However, without proper management, it can be chaotic. With individual expression, the group format makes "groupthink" a possible outcome. The advantages are greater because of group interaction. It is a viable option for both qualitative and quantitative research.

TABLE 2.1 Type of Group Interviews and Dimensions

Type	Setting	Role of Interviewer	Question Format	Purpose
Focus group	formal-preset	directive	unstructured	exploratory pretest
Brainstorming	formal or informal	nondirective	very unstructured	exploratory
Nominal/Delphi	formal	directive	structured	pretest exploratory
Field, natural	informal spontaneous	moderately nondirective	very unstructured	exploratory phenomenological
Field, formal	preset, but in field	somewhat directive	semistructured	phenomenological

SOURCE: Frey and Fontana (in press).

unstructured way in the field. Table 2.1 compares the types of group interviews on various dimensions.

The skills required of a group interviewer are not significantly different from those needed by an interviewer of individuals. The interviewer must be flexible, objective, empathic, persuasive, a good listener, and so on. But the group does present some unusual problems. Merton et al. (1956) note three specific skills needed by the group interviewer: First, the interviewer must keep one person or a small coalition of persons from dominating the group; second, he or she must encourage recalcitrant respondents to participate; and third, he or she must obtain responses from the entire group to ensure the fullest possible coverage of the topic. In addition, the interviewer must balance the directive interviewer role with the role of moderator, which calls for the management of the dynamics of the group being interviewed: "The group interviewer must simultaneously worry about the script of questions and be sensitive to the evolving patterns of group interaction" (Frey & Fontana, in press).

The group interview has the advantages of being inexpensive, data rich, flexible, stimulating to respondents, recall aiding, and cumulative and elaborative, over and above individual responses. This type of interview is not, however, without problems. The emerging group culture may interfere with individual expression, the group may be dominated by one person, the group format makes it difficult to research sensitive topics, "group-think" is a possible outcome, and the requirements for interviewer skills are greater because of group dynamics. Nevertheless, the group interview is a viable option for both qualitative and quantitative research.

### ◆ Unstructured Interviewing

Unstructured interviewing provides a greater breadth than the other types, given its qualitative nature. In this section we will discuss the traditional type of unstructured interview: the open-ended ethnographic (in-depth) interview. Many qualitative researchers differentiate between in-depth (or ethnographic) interviewing and participant observation. Yet, as Lofland (1971) points out, the two go hand in hand, and many of the data gathered in participant observation come from informal interviewing in the field. Consider the following report, from Malinowski's (1989) diary:

Saturday 8 [December 1917]. Got up late, felt rotten, took enema. At about 1 I went out; I heard cries; [people from] Kapwapu were bringing *uri* to Teyava. I sat with the natives, talked, took pictures. Went back. Billy corrected and supplemented my notes about *wasi*. At Teyava, an old man talked a great deal about fishes, but I did not understand him too well. Then we moved to his *bwayama*. Talked about *lili'u*. They kept questioning me about the war—In the evening I talked to the policeman about *bwaga'u*, *lili'u* and *yoyova*. I was irritated by their laughing. Billy again told me a number of interesting things. Took quinine and calomel. (p. 145)

Malinowski's "day in the field" shows how very important unstructured interviewing is in conducting fieldwork and clearly illustrates the difference between structured and unstructured interviewing. Malinowski has some general topics he wishes to know about, but he does not use closed-ended questions or a formal approach to interviewing. What's more, he commits (as most field-workers do) what structured interviewers would see as two "capital offenses": (a) He answers questions asked by the respondents, and (b) he lets his personal feelings influence him (as all field-workers do), and thus deviates from the "ideal" of a cool, distant, and rational interviewer.

Malinowski's example captures the differences between structured and unstructured interviewing. The former aims at capturing precise data of a codable nature in order to explain behavior within preestablished categories, whereas the latter is used in an attempt to understand the complex behavior of members of society without imposing any a priori categorization that may limit the field of inquiry. Indeed, Malinowski goes beyond any form of interviewing; he "immerses" himself in the native culture, letting it soak in by his mere interacting with the natives and "being there."

Spradley (1979) describes action, which would be is the very essence of human-to-human relationship rather than to exchange

Presently she smiled, It was her name. "El answered. . . . Then, her hand on my breast own breast. Many Bushi" (women), she said. me. (pp. 3-4)

Spradley goes on to discuss natives about them, t Although each and every elements of unstructured in detail elsewhere, and detailed accounts of un & Preiss, 1960; Denzin provide brief synopses; tic devices, as every se different combinations

### Accessing the Setting

How do we "get in attempting to study. O nude if doing a study o one may have to buy a locations if attempting 1985). The different w they all share the comm there is no setting per attempted to study poc with each interviewee.

Spradley (1979) describes the following interviewer-respondent interaction, which would be unthinkable in traditional sociological circles yet is the very essence of unstructured interviewing—the establishment of a human-to-human relation with the respondent and the desire to *understand* rather than to *explain*:

Presently she smiled, pressed her hand to her chest, and said: "Tsetchwe." It was her name. "Elizabeth," I said, pointing to myself. "Nisabe," she answered. . . . Then, having surely suspected that I was a woman, she put her hand on my breast gravely, and, finding out that I was, she touched her own breast. Many Bushmen do this; to them all Europeans look alike. "Tasusi" (women), she said. Then after a moment's pause Tsetchwe began to teach me. (pp. 3-4)

Spradley goes on to discuss all the things an interviewer learns from the natives about them, their culture, their language, their ways of life. Although each and every study is different, these are some of the basic elements of unstructured interviewing. These elements have been discussed in detail elsewhere, and we need not elaborate upon them too much (for detailed accounts of unstructured interviewing, see, among others, Adams & Preiss, 1960; Denzin, 1989b; Lofland, 1971; Spradley, 1979). Here we provide brief synopses; please remember that they are presented as heuristic devices, as every study uses slightly different elements and often in different combinations.

### Accessing the Setting

How do we "get in"? This of course varies with the group one is attempting to study. One may have to disrobe and casually stroll in the nude if doing a study of nude beaches (Douglas & Rasmussen, 1977), or one may have to buy a huge motorcycle and frequent seedy bars in certain locations if attempting to befriend and study the Hell's Angels (Thompson, 1985). The different ways and attempts to "get in" vary tremendously, but they all share the common goal of gaining access to the setting. Sometimes there is no setting per se, as when one of the authors (Fontana, 1977) attempted to study poor elderly on the streets and had to gain access anew with each interviewee.

## Understanding the Language and Culture of the Respondents

Irwin Deutscher (1968) wrote a seminal article on problems of language (lexicon, syntax, and phoneme) and meaning. To emphasize and clarify some of the problematics of language, Deutscher addressed the difficult task of asking questions cross-culturally.

Rosalie Wax (1960) gives perhaps the most poignant description available of learning the language and culture of the respondents in her study of "disloyal" Japanese in concentration camps in the United States between 1943 and 1945. She had to overcome a number of language and cultural problems in her study. Respondents may be fluent in the language of the interviewer, but there are different ways of saying things, and, indeed, certain things should not be said at all, linking language and cultural manifestations. Wax (1960) makes this point:

I remarked that I would like to see the letter. The silence that fell on the chatting group was almost palpable, and the embarrassment of the hosts was painful to see. The *faux pas* was not asking to see a letter, for letters were passed about rather freely. It rested on the fact that one did not give a Caucasian a letter in which the "disloyal" statement of a friend might be expressed. (p. 172)

Some researchers, especially in anthropological interviews, tend to rely on interpreters, and thus become vulnerable to an added layer of meanings, biases, and interpretations that may lead to disastrous misunderstanding (Freeman, 1983). At times, a specific jargon, such as the medical metalanguage of physicians, may be a code that is hard for nonmembers to understand.

## Deciding on How to Present Oneself

Do we present ourselves as representatives from academia studying medical students (Becker, 1956)? Do we approach an interview as a woman-to-woman discussion (Spradley, 1979)? Do we "dress down" to look like the respondents (Fontana, 1977; Thompson, 1985)? Do we represent the colonial culture (Malinowski, 1922) or do we humbly present ourselves as "learners" (Wax, 1960)? The decision of how to present

oneself is very important, it leaves a profound impression on the success (or failure) of the researcher's presentation. (1976) discovered in study assumed he was a "spy" for them of the contrary.

## Locating an Informant

The researcher must be willing to be an informant of mores and, at times, jarred by conduct without an informant to avoid many mistakes if a sociological informant is *Society* (1943). Without D would have been able to instructive is Paul Rabinow informant, Abd al-Malik provided Rabinow with a his actions provided insight a University of Chicago r

## Gaining Trust

Survey researchers ask the establishment of a nu too much work to do in th about nuclear dumps an forcefully. But what abo sexual intercourse or the a different story, and on dents (Cicourel, 1974). I "wallflower" in the wait masseuses gained enough interviews, the nature of trust is essential to an int

oneself is very important, because after one's presentational self is "cast" it leaves a profound impression on the respondents and has great influence on the success (or failure) of the study. Sometimes, inadvertently, the researcher's presentational self may be misrepresented, as John Johnson (1976) discovered in studying a welfare office, when some of the employees assumed he was a "spy" for management despite his best efforts to convince them of the contrary.

### Locating an Informant

The researcher must find an insider, a member of the group studied, willing to be an informant and to act as a guide to and translator of cultural mores and, at times, jargon or language. Although interviews can be conducted without an informant, a researcher can save much time and avoid many mistakes if a good informant becomes available. The "classic" sociological informant is Doc in William Foote Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (1943). Without Doc's help and guidance, it is doubtful that Whyte would have been able to learn about his subjects to the level he did. Very instructive is Paul Rabinow's (1977) discussion of his relation with his main informant, Abd al-Malik ben Lahcen. Malik acted as a translator but also provided Rabinow with access to the cultural ways of the subjects, and by his actions provided insights for Rabinow to the vast differences between a University of Chicago researcher and a native Moroccan.

### Gaining Trust

Survey researchers asking respondents whether or not they would favor the establishment of a nuclear dump in their state (Frey, 1993) do not have too much work to do in the way of gaining trust; respondents have opinions about nuclear dumps and are very willing to express them, sometimes forcefully. But what about asking respondents about their frequency of sexual intercourse or their preferred birth-control practices? That is clearly a different story, and one needs to establish some trust with such respondents (Cicourel, 1974). Paul Rasmussen (1989) had to spend months as a "wallflower" in the waiting room of a massage parlor before any of the masseuses gained enough trust in him to divulge to him, in unstructured interviews, the nature of their "massage" relations with clients. Gaining trust is essential to an interviewer's success, and even once it is gained trust

can be very fragile indeed; any *faux pas* by the researcher may destroy days, weeks, or months of painstakingly gained trust.

### Establishing Rapport

Because the goal of unstructured interviewing is *understanding*, it becomes paramount for the researcher to establish rapport. He or she must be able to put him- or herself in the role of the respondents and attempt to see the situation from their perspective, rather than impose the world of academia and preconceptions upon them. Close rapport with respondents opens doors to more informed research, but it may also create problems, as the researcher may become a spokesperson for the group studied, losing his or her distance and objectivity, or may "go native" and become a member of the group and forgo the academic role. At times, what the researcher may feel is good rapport turns out not to be, as Thompson (1985) found out in a nightmarish way when he was subjected to a brutal beating by the Hell's Angels just as his study of them was coming to a close. At the other end of the spectrum, some researchers may never feel they have good rapport with subjects; for example, Malinowski (1989) always mistrusted the motives of the natives and at times was troubled by what he saw as their brutish sensuality or angered by their outright lying or deception: "After lunch I [carried] yellow calico and spoke about the *baloma*. I made a small *sagali*, Navavile. I was *fed up* with the *niggers*" (p. 154).

### Collecting Empirical Materials

Being out in the field does not afford one the luxury of videotapes, soundproof rooms, and high-quality recording equipment. Lofland (1971) provides detailed information on doing and writing up interviews and on the types of field notes one ought to take and how to organize them. Yet often one must make do; the "tales" of field-workers' attempts to make field notes range from holding a miniature tape recorder as inconspicuously as possible to taking mental notes and then rushing to the privacy of a bathroom to jot them down, on toilet paper at times. We agree with Lofland (1971) that regardless of the circumstances one ought to (a) take notes regularly and promptly; (b) write everything down, no matter how unimportant it may seem at the time; (c) try to be as inconspicuous as possible in note taking; and (d) analyze one's notes frequently.

### ◆ Other Types of Unstructured Interview

We will consider the issue of oral history later in this chapter. Now we turn to unstructured interviews.

#### Oral History

The oral history does not have a long history, but in purpose it goes back to ancient days, although it was not until 1948, when Allan Nevins of the University of Wisconsin (Starr, 1984, p. 10), began to collect lives, from common folk. Oral history, as in *Working* (1975), to history of President Harry Truman in 1962. Often, oral history transcripts are in libraries, silent memoirs are in libraries, bringing their testimony to life.

Often oral history is a way of life, been ignored, oppressed, and often of Lomax and Lomax (1984, p. 10) verbal expressions and culture of the tramp, the lumberjack, the "Plantation Negro" (p. xx) of the Vietnam War—blacks (Terrence Marshall, 1987)—have been ignored accounts.

Recently, oral history has been used (Patai, 1991) as a way to understand a culture that has been ignored. "Refusing to be rendered silent, creating a new history—oral history" (1984, p. 222). The attempt to reconnect to the women in their own histories, to the experiences of women, and to the oral history (Gluck & Patai, 1991; R.



## ◆ Other Types of Unstructured Interviewing

We will consider the issue of interpreting and reporting empirical materials later in this chapter. Now we will briefly outline some different types of unstructured interviews.

### Oral History

The oral history does not differ from the unstructured interview methodologically, but in purpose. Oral collection of historical material goes back to ancient days, although its modern formal organization can be traced to 1948, when Allan Nevins began the Oral History Project at Columbia University (Starr, 1984, p. 4). Oral history captures a variety of people's lives, from common folks talking about their jobs, as in Studs Terkel's *Working* (1975), to historical recollections of famous people, such as President Harry Truman in Merle Miller's *Plain Speaking* (see Starr, 1984). Often, oral history transcripts are not published but may be found in libraries, silent memoirs awaiting someone to rummage through them and bring their testimony to life.

Often oral history is a way to reach groups and individuals who have been ignored, oppressed, and/or forgotten. A classic example is the work of Lomax and Lomax (1934/1966), who used ballads and folk songs as verbal expressions and cultural commentaries on "the cowboy, the miner, the tramp, the lumberjack, the Forty-niner, the soldier, the sailor, the Plantation Negro" (p. xxvii). Also, the forgotten people involved in the Vietnam War—blacks (Terry, 1984) and women (Fontana & Collins, 1993; Marshall, 1987)—have been brought to the fore through their personal accounts.

Recently, oral history has found popularity among feminists (Gluck & Patai, 1991) as a way to understand and bring forth the history of women in a culture that has traditionally relied on a masculine interpretation: "Refusing to be rendered historically voiceless any longer, women are creating a new history—using our own voices and experiences" (Gluck, 1984, p. 222). The attempt continues, through the use of oral history to reconnect to the women missing in history and the women who are missing in their own histories, to capture the work of women, the lives and experiences of women, and the social and personal meanings of women (Gluck & Patai, 1991; Reinhartz, 1992).



### Creative Interviewing

Close to oral history but used more conventionally as a sociological tool is Jack Douglas's (1985) "creative interviewing." Douglas argues against the "how-to" ways to conduct interviews because unstructured interviews take place in the largely situational everyday world of members of society. Thus interviewing and interviewers must necessarily be creative, forget "how-to" rules, and adapt themselves to the ever-changing situations they face. Like oral historians, Douglas sees interviewing as collecting oral reports from the members of society. These reports go well beyond the length of conventional unstructured interviews and may become "life histories," taking multiple sessions over many days with the subject(s). "Forgetting the rules" in creative interviewing allows research subjects to express themselves more freely, and thus to have a greater voice both in the research process and in the research report.

### Postmodern Interviewing

Douglas's concern with the important role played by the interviewer *qua* human being, which is also shared by the feminist oral historians, became a paramount element of postmodern anthropologists and sociologists in the mid-1980s. Marcus and Fischer (1986) address ethnography at large, but their discussion is very germane to unstructured interviewing because, as we have seen, it constitutes the major way of collecting data in fieldwork. Marcus and Fischer voice reflexive concerns about the ways in which the researcher influences the study, in both the methods of data collection and the techniques of reporting findings; this concern leads to new ways to conduct interviews in the hope of minimizing the interviewer's influence. This influence, of course, cannot be eliminated, but it can be neutralized if its assumptions and premises are made as clear as possible.

One way to do this is through *polyphonic* interviewing, in which the voices of the subjects are recorded with minimal influence from the researcher and are not collapsed together and reported as one, through the interpretation of the researcher. Instead, the multiple perspectives of the various subjects are reported and differences and problems encountered are discussed, rather than glossed over (see Krieger, 1983). *Interpretive* interactionism follows in the footsteps of creative and polyphonic interviewing, but, borrowing from James Joyce, adds a new element, that of epiphanies, described as "those interactional moments that leave marks on

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### ◆ Gendered Interviewing

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people's lives [and] have the potential for creating transformational experiences for the person" (Denzin, 1989a, p. 15). Thus the topic of inquiry becomes dramatized by the focus on existential moments in people's lives, producing richer and more meaningful data. *Critical ethnography* (and interviewing) (Giroux, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) relies on critical theory; it is ethnography that accounts for the historical, social, and economical situations. Critical ethnographers realize the strictures caused by these situations and their value-laden agendas. Critical ethnographers see themselves as blue-collar "cultural workers" (Giroux, 1992) attempting to broaden the political dimensions of cultural work while undermining existing oppressive systems. Finally, as postmodernists seek new ways of understanding and reporting data, some are combining visual and written modes of communication. Ulmer (1989) introduces the concept of *oralysis*, "referring to the ways in which oral forms, derived from everyday life, are, with the recording powers of video, applied to the analytical tasks associated with literate forms" (p. xi). In *oralysis*, the traditional product of interviewing, talk, is coupled with the visual, providing, according to Ulmer, a product more consonant with a society that is dominated by the medium of television. Becker (1981) also engages in visual/written sociological commentaries, as does Douglas Harper (1982). The journal *Visual Sociology* is devoted to such commentaries.

#### ◆ Gendered Interviews

The housewife goes into a well-stocked store to look for a frying pan. Her thinking probably does not proceed exactly this way, but it is helpful to think of the many possible two-way choices she might make: Cast iron or aluminum? Thick or thin? Metal or wooden handle? Covered or not? Deep or shallow? Large or small? This brand or that? Reasonable or too high in price? To buy or not? Cash or charge? Have it delivered or carry it. . . . The two-way question is simplicity itself when it comes to recording answers and tabulating them. (Payne, 1951, pp. 55-56)

This quote represents the prevalent paternalistic attitude toward women in interviewing (see Oakley, 1981, p. 39) as well as the paradigmatic concern with coding answers and therefore presenting limited, dichotomous choices. Apart from a tendency to be condescending toward women, the traditional interview paradigm does not account for gendered differ-

ences. In fact, Babbie's classic text *The Practice of Social Research* (1992) briefly references gender only three times and says nothing about the influence of gender on interviews. As Ann Oakley (1981) cogently points out, both the interviewers and the respondents are considered faceless and invisible, and they must be if the paradigmatic assumption of gathering value-free data is to be maintained. Yet, as Denzin (1989a, p. 116) tells us, "gender filters knowledge"; that is, the sex of the interviewer and of the respondent does make a difference, as the interview takes place within the cultural boundaries of a paternalistic social system in which masculine identities are differentiated from feminine ones.

In typical interviews there exists a hierarchical relation, with the respondent being in the subordinate position. The interviewer is instructed to be courteous, friendly, and pleasant:

The interviewer's manner should be friendly, courteous, conversational and unbiased. He should be neither too grim nor too effusive; neither too talkative nor too timid. The idea should be to put the respondent at ease, so that he will talk freely and fully. (Selltiz, Jahoda, Deutsch, & Cook, 1965, p. 576; emphasis added)

Yet, as the last above-quoted line shows, this demeanor is a ruse to gain the trust and confidence of the respondent without reciprocating in any way. Interviewers are not to give their own opinions and are to evade direct questions. What seems to be a conversation is really a one-way pseudoconversation, raising the ethical dilemma (Fine, 1983-1984) of studying people for opportunistic reasons. When the respondent is female the interview presents added problems, because the preestablished format directed at information relevant for the study tends both to ignore the respondent's own concerns and to curtail any attempts to digress and elaborate. This format also stymies any revelation of personal feelings and emotions.

Warren (1988) discusses problems of gender in both anthropological and sociological fieldwork, and many of them apply to the ethnographic interview. Some of these problems are the traditional ones of *entr e* and trust, which may be heightened by the sex of the interviewer, especially in highly sex-segregated societies: "I never witnessed any ceremonies that were barred to women. Whenever I visited compounds I sat with the women while the men gathered in the parlors or in front of the compound. . . . I never

entered any of the places where the women were and to chat" (Sudarkasa, 1988, p. 19).

Solutions to the problem of gender in research are to grant the respondent more control in her research. Warren (1988) and therefore seen as a feminist approach addresses the greater role of women in research where women are secluded by status or race and the control is magnified for female researchers at times face the added hassle (Warren, 1988, p. 319, 1967).

Feminist researchers have developed an interviewing paradigm. It is a line paradigm (Oakley, 1981), stressing masculine traits and ignoring traits such as sensitivity viewed as feminine.

There is a growing awareness of the problem (Oakley, 1981; Reinharz, 1981) of viewing women as "objects," without regard for their own views. Whereas this reluctance to use relevant methodological approaches, there is "no intimacy" with the respondent, shifting to allow the respondent to attempt to show their human side. In methodologically, this new approach and a greater insight into the hierarchical pitfall (Reinharz, 1981) control the sequencing of the interview, giving them the freedom of the interview (1992; Smith, 1987). The 'progress' into details of their working lives. M. Yeandle, 1984; quoted in

entered any of the places where men sat around to drink beer or palm wine and to chat" (Sudarkasa, 1986; quoted in Warren, 1988, p. 16).

Solutions to the problem have been to view the female anthropologist as androgyne or to grant her honorary male status for the duration of her research. Warren (1988) points to some advantages of being female and therefore seen as harmless or invisible; Hanna Papanek (1964) addresses the greater role flexibility of women interviewers in countries where women are secluded. Other problems concern the researcher's status or race and the context of the interview; again, these problems are magnified for female researchers in a paternalistic world. Female interviewers at times face the added burden of sexual overtures or covert sexual hassle (Warren, 1988, p. 33), or are considered low-status strangers (Daniels, 1967).

Feminist researchers have suggested ways to circumvent the traditional interviewing paradigm. It has been suggested that interviewing is a masculine paradigm (Oakley, 1981), embedded in a masculine culture and stressing masculine traits while at the same time excluding from interviewing traits such as sensitivity, emotionality, and others that are culturally viewed as feminine.

There is a growing reluctance, especially among female researchers (Oakley, 1981; Reinharz, 1992; Smith, 1987), to continue interviewing women as "objects," with little or no regard for them as individuals. Whereas this reluctance stems from moral and ethical issues, it is also very relevant methodologically. As Oakley (1981) points out, in interviewing there is "no intimacy without reciprocity" (p. 49). Thus the emphasis is shifting to allow the development of a closer relation between interviewer and respondent, attempting to minimize status differences and doing away with the traditional hierarchical situation in interviewing. Interviewers can show their human side and answer questions and express feelings. Methodologically, this new approach provides a greater spectrum of responses and a greater insight into respondents—or "participants," to avoid the hierarchical pitfall (Reinharz, 1992, p. 22)—because it encourages them to control the sequencing and the language of the interview and also allows them the freedom of open-ended responses (Oakley, 1981; Reinharz, 1992; Smith, 1987). Thus: "Women were always . . . encouraged to 'digress' into details of their personal histories and to recount anecdotes of their working lives. Much important information was gathered in this way" (Yeandle, 1984; quoted in Reinharz, 1992, p. 25).

This commitment to maintaining the integrity of the phenomena and preserving the viewpoint of the subjects as expressed in their everyday language is akin to phenomenological and existential sociologies (Douglas & Johnson, 1977; Kotarba & Fontana, 1984) and also reflects the concern of postmodern ethnographers (Marcus & Fischer, 1986). The differences are (a) the heightened moral concern for subjects/participants; (b) the attempt to redress the male-female hierarchy and existing paternalistic power structure; (c) the paramount importance placed upon membership, as the effectiveness of male researchers in interviewing female subjects has been largely discredited; and (d) the realization that the old "distanced" style of interviewing cuts the subjects' involvement drastically and, thus, rather than giving us an "objective" interview, gives us a one-sided and therefore inaccurate picture.

Some feminist sociologists have gone beyond the concern with interviewing or fieldwork in itself. Laurel Richardson (1992) is striving for new forms of expression to report findings and has presented some of her fieldwork in the form of poetry. Patricia Clough (1992) questions the whole enterprise of fieldwork under the current paradigm and calls for a reassessment of the whole sociological enterprise and for a rereading of existing sociological texts in a light that is not marred by paternalistic bias. These researchers' voices echo the concern of Dorothy Smith (1987), who eloquently states:

The problem [of a research project] and its particular solution are analogous to those by which fresco painters solved the problems of representing the different temporal moments of a story in the singular space of the wall. The problem is to produce in a two-dimensional space framed as a wall a world of action and movement in time. (p. 281)

### ◆ Framing and Interpreting Interviews

Besides the problem of framing real-life events in a two-dimensional space, we face the added problems of how the framing is being done and who is doing the framing. In sociological terms this means that the type of interviewing selected, the techniques used, the ways of recording information, all come to bear on the results of the study. Additionally, data must be interpreted and the researcher has a great deal of influence on what part of the data will be reported and how it will be reported.

### Framing Interviews

There have been structured interview (1979; Gorden, 1986) literature on group search (for an up-to-date review, see Shamdasani, 1990) linked to qualitative research (1988). Unstructured interviews (Denzin, 1988; 1979). Also noteworthy is the "Personal Relationship Interview" and warns against attempting to do so.

As we have noted, the informal nature of the preestablished set of questions involved in interviewing following a formal protocol and varying one's techniques tell us much about the relation with the respondent while trying to elicit what he or she has in mind. General questions are as inconspicuous as the veracity of statements according to traditional "real" conversation. The respondent or participant avoids "getting too close" (e.g., "It doesn't matter" by feigning ignorance of anything—you're on gendered interview techniques and "conversations" (Daniels, 1983).

### Framing Interviews

There have been numerous volumes published on the techniques of structured interviewing (see, among others, Babbie, 1992; Bradburn et al., 1979; Gorden, 1980; Kahn & Cannell, 1957). There is also a voluminous literature on group interviewing, especially in marketing and survey research (for an up-to-date review of literature in this area, see Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Recently, the uses of group interviewing have been linked to qualitative sociology also (Frey & Fontana, in press; Morgan, 1988). Unstructured interviewing techniques have been covered abundantly (Denzin, 1989b; Lofland, 1971; Lofland & Lofland, 1984; Spradley, 1979). Also noteworthy is Kuhn's article "The Interview and the Professional Relationship" (1962), in which he considers interview as a "performance" and warns against "mystification," or loss of sincerity in the interview by attempting to overmanage it.

As we have noted, unstructured interviews vary widely, given their informal nature and the nature of the setting, and some eschew any preestablished set of techniques (Douglas, 1985). Yet, there are techniques involved in interviewing, whether one is just being "a nice person" or is following a format. Techniques can be varied to meet various situations, and varying one's techniques is known as employing tactics. Traditional techniques tell us that the researcher is involved in an informal conversation with the respondent, thus he or she must maintain a tone of "friendly" chat while trying to remain close to the guidelines of the topics of inquiry he or she has in mind. The researcher begins by "breaking the ice" with general questions and gradually moves on to more specific ones, while also, as inconspicuously as possible, asking questions intended to check the veracity of statements made by the respondent. The researcher, again according to traditional techniques, should avoid getting involved in a "real" conversation in which he or she answers questions asked by the respondent or provides personal opinions on the matters discussed. One avoids "getting trapped" by shrugging off the relevance of one's opinions (e.g., "It doesn't matter how I feel, it's your opinion that's important") or by feigning ignorance (e.g., "I really don't know enough about this to say anything—you're the expert"). Of course, as noted in the above discussion on gendered interviewing, the researcher may reject these outdated techniques and "come down" to the level of the respondent and engage in a "real" conversation with "give and take" and empathic understanding (see Daniels, 1983). This makes the interview more honest, morally sound, and

reliable, because it treats the respondent as an equal, allows him or her to express personal feelings, and therefore presents a more "realistic" picture than can be uncovered using traditional interview methods.

The use of language and specific terms is very important for creating a "sharedness of meanings" in which both interviewer and respondent understand the contextual nature of the interview. For instance, in studying nude beaches, Douglas and Rasmussen (1977) discovered that the term "nude beach virgin" had nothing to do with chastity, but referred to the fact that a person's buttocks were white, thus indicating to others that he or she was a newcomer to the nude beach. Language is also important in delineating the type of question (broad, narrow, leading, instructive, and so on). Unstructured conversation, mere chitchat, listening to others without taking notes or trying to direct the conversation is also important to establish rapport and immerse oneself in the situation, while gathering a store of "tacit knowledge" about the people and the culture being studied (see our discussion of Malinowski above).

Nonverbal elements are also important in interviewing. There are basically four kinds of nonverbal technique:

*Proxemic* communication is the use of interpersonal space to communicate attitudes, *chronemics* communication is the use of pacing of speech and length of silence in conversation, *kinesic* communication includes any body movements or postures, and *paralinguistic* communication includes all the variations in volume, pitch and quality of voice. (Gorden, 1980, p. 335)

All of these are very important for the researcher and the researched alike, because nonverbal communication both informs and sets the tone for the interview. Looks, body postures, long silences, the way one dresses—all are significant in the interactional interview situation. Goffman (1959, 1971) has explored in detail the importance of nonverbal features in interaction as well as the consonance between verbal and nonverbal features. An amusing example of the wrong use of nonverbal communication is provided by Thompson (1985). Because he was attempting to be allowed to study the Hell's Angels as a participant observer, he began to frequent their hangouts, dress the part, and speak the proper jargon. He even bought a motorcycle—however, he got into trouble by buying a British model; he had failed to realize that for true-blue Angels, only a Harley-Davidson will do.

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### Interpreting Inter

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Finally, techniques vary with the group being interviewed. One will need a different approach for interviewing children (Fine & Sandstrom, 1988) from that required for interviewing widows (Lopata, 1980); drug dealers will not wish to be interviewed at all (Adler, 1985). The researcher must adapt to the world of the individuals studied and try to share their concerns and outlooks. Only by doing so can he or she learn anything at all. As Patricia Adler (1985) slowly and painfully discovered, it is not easy to gain the trust of drug dealers so that they will allow you to interview them.

### Interpreting Interviews

Many studies using unstructured interviews are not reflexive enough about the interpreting process; common platitudes proclaim that data speak for themselves, that the researcher is neutral, unbiased, and "invisible." Data reported tend to flow nicely, there are no contradictory data and no mention of what data were excluded and/or why. Improprieties never happen and the main concern seems to be the proper, if unreflexive, filing, analyzing, and reporting of events. But anyone who has engaged in fieldwork knows better; no matter how organized the researcher may be, he or she slowly becomes buried under a growing mountain of field notes, transcripts, newspaper clippings, and tape recordings. Traditionally, readers were presented with the researcher's interpretation of the data, cleaned and streamlined and collapsed in rational, noncontradictory accounts. More recently, sociologists have come to grips with the reflexive, problematic, and, at times, contradictory nature of data and with the tremendous, if unspoken, influence of the researcher as an author (see Dickens & Fontana, 1994; Geertz, 1988). What Van Maanen (1988) calls "confessional style" began in earnest in the 1970s (see Johnson, 1976) and has continued unabated to the present day, in a soul cleansing by researchers of problematic feelings and sticky situations in the field. Although perhaps somewhat overdone at times, these "confessions" are very valuable, as they make readers aware of the complex and cumbersome nature of interviewing people in their natural settings and lend a tone of realism and veracity to studies: "Yesterday I slept very late. Got up around 10. The day before I had engaged Omega, Koupa, and a few others. They didn't come. Again I fell into a rage" (Malinowski, 1967/1989, p. 67).

Showing the human side of the researcher and the problems of unstructured interviewing has taken new forms in deconstructionism (Derrida, 1976), where the influence of the author is brought under scrutiny. The



text created by the rendition of events by the researcher is "deconstructed," as his or her biases and taken-for-granted notions are exposed and, at times, alternative ways to look at the data are introduced (Clough, 1992).

Postmodern social researchers, as we have seen, attempt to expose and openly acknowledge the role of the researcher *qua* field-worker and *qua* author. Thus, for instance, Crapanzano (1980) reports Tuhami's accounts, whether they be sociohistorical renditions, dreams, or outright lies, because they all constitute parts of his Moroccan Arab subject's sense of self and personal history. In interviewing Tuhami, Crapanzano learns not only about his subject but about himself:

As Tuhami's interlocutor, I became an active participant in his life history, even though I rarely appear directly in his recitations. Not only did my presence, and my questions, prepare him for the text he was to produce, but they produced what I read as a change of consciousness in him. They produced a change of consciousness in me too. We were both jostled from our assumptions about the nature of the everyday world and ourselves and groped for common reference points within this limbo of interchange. (p. 11)

No longer pretending to be faceless subject and invisible researcher, Tuhami and Crapanzano are portrayed as individual human beings with their own personal histories and idiosyncrasies, and we, the readers, learn about two people and two cultures.

### ◆ Ethical Considerations

Because the objects of inquiry in interviewing are human beings, extreme care must be taken to avoid any harm to them. Traditional ethical concerns have revolved around the topics of *informed consent* (consent received from the subject after he or she has been carefully and truthfully informed about the research), *right to privacy* (protecting the identity of the subject) and *protection from harm* (physical, emotional, or any other kind). Whereas no sociologist or other social scientist would dismiss these three concerns as trivial, there are other ethical concerns that are less unanimously upheld. The controversy over overt/covert fieldwork is more germane to participant observation, but could include the surreptitious use of tape-recording devices. Warwick and Douglas, for instance, argue for the use of covert

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methods because they mirror the deceitfulness of everyday-life reality, whereas others, such as Kai Erikson, are vehemently opposed to the study of uninformed subjects (see Punch, 1986).

Another problematic issue stems from the degree of involvement on the part of the researcher with the group under study. Whyte was asked to vote illegally (to vote more than once) during local elections by the members of the group he had gained access to and befriended, gaining their trust. He used "situational ethics," and judged the legal infraction to be minor in comparison to the loss of his fieldwork if he refused to vote as he was asked. Thompson was faced with a more serious possible legal breach. He was terrified of having to witness one of the alleged rapes for which the Hell's Angels have become notorious, but, as he reports, none took place during his research. The most famous, and probably most widely discussed, case of questionable ethics in qualitative sociology is Laud Humphreys's research for *Tearoom Trade* (1970). Humphreys studied homosexual encounters in public restrooms in parks ("tearooms") by acting as a lookout ("watchqueen"). This fact in itself may be seen as ethically incorrect, but it is the following one that has raised many academic eyebrows. Unable to interview the men in the "tearooms," Humphreys recorded their car license plate numbers, which he used to trace the men to their residences. He then changed his appearance and interviewed many of the men in their homes, without being recognized.

Another ethical problem is raised by those who question the veracity of reports made by researchers. For example, Whyte's (1943) famous study of Italian men in Boston has recently come under severe scrutiny (Boelen, 1992), as some have alleged that he portrayed the "Corner Boys" in demeaning ways that did not reflect their visions of themselves. Whyte's case is still unresolved, but it does illustrate the delicate issue of ethical decisions in the field and in reporting field notes, even some 50-odd years later!

A growing number of scholars, as we have seen (Oakley, 1981), feel that most of traditional in-depth interviewing is unethical, whether wittingly or unwittingly, and we agree wholeheartedly. The techniques and tactics of interviewing are really ways of manipulating respondents while treating them as objects or numbers rather than individual human beings. Should the quest for objectivity supersede the human side of those whom we study? Consider the following experience that one of us had:

One day while doing research at the convalescent center, I was talking to one of the aides while she was beginning to change the bedding of one of

the patients who had urinated and soaked the bed. He was the old, blind, ex-wrestler confined in the emergency room. Suddenly, the wrestler decided he was not going to cooperate with the aide and began striking violently at the air about him, fortunately missing the aide. Since nobody else was around, I had no choice but to hold the patient pinned down to the bed while the aide proceeded to change the bedding. It was not pleasant: The patient was squirming and yelling horrible threats at the top of his voice; the acid smell of urine was nauseating; I was slowly losing my grip on the much stronger patient, while all along feeling horribly like Chief Bromden when he suffocates the lobotomized Mac Murphy in Ken Kesey's novel. *But there was no choice, one just could not sit back and take notes while the patient tore apart the aide.* (Fontana, 1977, p. 187; emphasis added)

Clearly, as we move forward with sociology, we cannot, to paraphrase what Herbert Blumer said so many years ago, let the methods dictate our images of human beings. As Punch (1986) suggests, as field-workers we need to exercise common sense and moral responsibility, and, we would like to add, to our subjects first, to the study next, and to ourselves last.

### ◆ Conclusion

In this chapter we have outlined the history of interviewing, with its qualitative and quantitative origins. We have looked at structured, group, and various types of unstructured interviewing. We have examined the importance of gender in interviewing and the ways in which framing and interpreting affect interviews. Finally, we have examined the importance of ethics in interviewing.

Clearly, different types of interviewing are suited to different situations. If we wish to find out how many people oppose a nuclear repository, survey research is our best tool, and we can quantify and code the responses and use mathematical models to explain our findings (Frey, 1993). If we are interested in opinions about a given product, a focus group interview will provide us with the most efficient results; if we wish to know and understand about the lives of Palestinian women in the resistance (Gluck, 1991), we need to interview them at length and in depth in an unstructured way.

Many scholars are now realizing that to pit one type of interviewing against another is a futile effort, a leftover from the paradigmatic quanti-

tative/qualitative hostility of researchers are using often better results. The triangulating, a research tions. For instance, group survey research and is tion (Morgan, 1988).

Interviewing is current but a much deeper one (Volume 1, this series). It is a field, sterilized, measured but has become a living one—a black combatant sociologically invisible into focus as real persons in learning about the world. That is, as we treat the objective, faceless into close ourselves, learn

The brief journey should allow us to be aware of the problematics of asking whether that each individual perspective on the world. Oakley (1981) notes that we know what it is, and in front door there is a world. I think we know how to ask everyday folks to help us about people we mean to uncover their lives. We treat respondents as uninteresting is to fill one more box. It will be commensurate with them. We are not done. I asked her lifelong question when Alice could not answer is the question?" The answer is to be answered by

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tative/qualitative hostility of past generations. Thus an increasing number of researchers are using multimethod approaches to achieve broader and often better results. This is referred to as *triangulation* (Denzin, 1989b). In triangulating, a researcher may use several methods in different combinations. For instance, group interviewing has long been used to complement survey research and is now being used to complement participant observation (Morgan, 1988).

Interviewing is currently undergoing not only a methodological change but a much deeper one, related to self and other (see Fine, Chapter 4, Volume 1, this series). The "other" is no longer a distant, aseptic, quantified, sterilized, measured, categorized, and cataloged faceless respondent, but has become a living human being, usually a forgotten or an oppressed one—a black combatant in a Vietnam camp or myriad women, up to now sociologically invisible, finally blossoming to full living color and coming into focus as real persons, as the interviewer recognizes them as such. Also, in learning about the other we learn about the self (Crapanzano, 1980). That is, as we treat the other as a human being, we can no longer remain objective, faceless interviewers, but become human beings and must disclose ourselves, learning about ourselves as we try to learn about the other.

The brief journey we have taken through the world of interviewing should allow us to be better informed and perhaps more sensitized to the problematics of asking questions for sociological reasons. We must remember that each individual has his or her own social history and an individual perspective on the world. Thus we cannot take our task for granted. As Oakley (1981) notes, "Interviewing is rather like a marriage: everybody knows what it is, an awful lot of people do it, and yet behind each closed front door there is a world of secrets" (p. 41). She is quite correct—we all think we know how to ask questions and talk to people, from common, everyday folks to highly qualified quantophrenic experts. Yet, to learn about people we must remember to treat them as people, and they will uncover their lives to us. As long as many researchers continue to treat respondents as unimportant, faceless individuals whose only contribution is to fill one more boxed response, the answers we, as researchers, will get will be commensurable with the questions we ask and with the way we ask them. We are no different from Gertrude Stein, who, on her deathbed, asked her lifelong companion, Alice B. Toklas, "What is the answer?" And when Alice could not bring herself to speak, Gertrude asked, "Then what is the question?" The question must be asked person-to-person if we want it to be answered fully.

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◆ This chapter discusses the use of qualitative data. We examine some of the methods we use in discussing methods. We then consider showing how to enact the concepts of themes into the observational research in shaping the future, speculative, shifting epistemology.

For as long as the natural world has been a part of our lives, we have been trying to understand it.

**AUTHORS' NOTE**  
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