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Asking Questions and Individual Interviews

This chapter introduces these topics:

- Question and answer sequences: *open* and *closed* questions and how to ask follow-up questions.

- *Structure* in interviews.

- Forms of interviewing, including *phenomenological, ethnographic, feminist, oral* and *life history*; *dialogic* interviewing; *decolonizing* interviews; *object, graphic,* and *photo elicitation* interviews; and *walking* interviews.

Arguing that we now live in a "post-postmodern, cinematic-interview society," Norman Denzin (2018, p. 146), asserted that the interview is a pervasive method of constructing the self. We not only consume information from interviews, but interview confessions entertain the public (p. 149). Although we are well-acquainted with interviews from their widespread dissemination in a variety of media, in this chapter I begin by examining the basic conversational sequence used in interviewing: questions and answers. Second, I discuss different structures for interviewing, including structured, semi-structured, and unstructured formats. Third, I review a variety of approaches that qualitative researchers use to conduct individual interviews.

In contemporary qualitative research practice, there are numerous formats for conducting individual interviews, along with many labels. These include semi-structured, unstructured, and structured interviews; formal and informal interviews; long, creative, open-ended, depth, and in-depth interviews; life history, life story, oral history, and biographic interviews; feminist interviews; ethnographic interviews; phenomenological interviews; dialogical, conversational, and epistemic interviews; decolonizing and Indigenous approaches to interviewing; interviews augmented with object, graphic, and photo elicitation methods; and mobile interviews such as the go-along and walking interviews. And this is by no means an exhaustive list! By reviewing some common interview formats, I hope that readers will gain a better sense of the diversity of practice described in methodological literature and that researchers use to conduct studies in the social and health sciences and applied fields. Researchers can select the interview structure and format that aligns with their theoretical assumptions and that is appropriate to generate data to answer research questions.

Types of Interviews

Researchers use qualitative interviews to ask questions of individuals, dyads, or groups. Interviews take place in face-to-face contexts, via telephone, or online via synchronous or asynchronous computer-mediated interaction. In this book, I focus on qualitative interviews in which an interviewer generates talk with an interviewee or interviewees for the purposes of eliciting spoken rather than written data to examine research problems. There is a growing body of literature for researchers interested in online interviewing. Both synchronous and asynchronous tools involving emails, texts, and videoconferencing have been used to conduct interviews. The topic of online interviewing will be discussed in Chapter 6.

This book does not review structured interviews or standardized surveys. Standardized interviews and surveys generate responses that are coded to fixed sets of categories and are analyzed quantitatively. These are typically administered via telephone or voice-activated technologies. Plentiful advice on constructing and administering surveys and questionnaires may be found (e.g., Conrad & Schober, 2008; Ornstein, 2013), and researchers have investigated the conduct of standardized interviews for decades (e.g., Gathman et al., 2008; Maynard & Hollander, 2014, Maynard et al., 2002; Schaeffer & Maynard, 2002; Suchman & Jordan, 1990).

The term "interviews" is used to encompass many forms of talk, including clinical interviews, job interviews, journalistic interviews, admissions interviews, teacher–parent interviews, and so forth. What these forms have in common is that speakers engage in asking and answering questions. Whatever the structure or format of an interview or modality used to conduct it (such as telephone, face-to-face, or computer-mediated), the basic unit of interaction is the question–answer sequence. Since researchers ask questions of participants with the aim of eliciting answers, the next section examines how questions

and answers work and how the way in which a question is formulated directly impacts what comes next.

Questions and Answers

Although questions seek answers, asking one does not mean an answer will be forthcoming or that an answer will relate to the question posed. In his analysis of conversation, sociologist Harvey Sacks (1992) located a class of utterances that he labeled "adjacency pairs" (see Appendix 2 for a glossary of terms used in conversation analysis). In an adjacency pair (e.g., question–answers; greetings), when a speaker utters a first-pair part (e.g., question or greeting), they expect a second-pair part to be forthcoming (e.g., answer, greeting). Interviews are built on the assumption that an interviewer's questions will elicit an interviewee's answers. Although we usually recognize when someone asks a question, asking questions that an interviewee understands and will answer in a way that provides relevant information for research is not always straightforward. Let's start with two types of questions: "closed" and "open" questions.

Closed Questions

Closed questions limit the type of answer that interviewees are expected to give to short answers (yes/no) and statements—for example,

- Do you agree or disagree with X?

- When do you plan to do Y?

- Did you enjoy Z?

In addition to narrowing the range of options for how a person might answer a question, questions can also anticipate or *prefer* a particular kind of answer. Let's look at an example.

- Q. Understanding questions is simple, isn't it?

- A. Not so fast!

As another example, an invitation has a *preferred* response of acceptance, which is the "unmarked" response. When people decline an invitation, they typically add an account for why they cannot accept. Turning down an invitation is an example of a *dispreferred* response that is "marked." Preference structure should not be confused with agreeing responses or what we like. Rather, preference refers to the social norm for a next action that is typically unmarked. For example, when people engage in self-deprecations, the preferred response from a recipient is to disagree. If a recipient agrees with an interlocutor who has insulted themselves (e.g., "This haircut looks terrible!"—"Yes, it does."), this presents an interactional difficulty in the maintenance of the social fabric between speakers.

Let's return to the previous question: "Understanding questions is simple, isn't it?" This question is posed as an assertion with a tag ("isn't it?") that implies agreement ("yes"). The answer following the statement is the dispreferred or marked response. Researchers have found that dispreferred responses are usually followed by accounts or explanations as demonstrated in these paragraphs. Although the question implies confirmation, the answer illustrates a dispreferred response. The closed questions that open this section (Do you agree or disagree with X?; When do you plan to do Y? Did you enjoy Z?) all narrow responses to particular answers (e.g., agree/disagree; tomorrow/next week/next month; yes/no). Closed questions limit the potential for participants to disagree with the premise of the question (e.g., "I hadn't thought about X before"; "I'm not going to do Y"; "Z didn't matter to me"). Asking a closed question, however, does not predict what happens next.

Figure 1.1 depicts the potential ways that interviewees can answer a closed question. The dotted arrow from the dispreferred response to the account or explanation indicates that a speaker might or might not provide an explanation for their answers. In other words, people do not necessarily explain dispreferred responses.

Many texts advise qualitative interviewers to ask *open* rather than *closed* questions. This is because closed questions have the potential to generate short one-word answers corresponding with yes/no or factual information implied by the question (for example, Q: "As a child, did you enjoy school?" A: "Yes"). For example, the closed question posed in Excerpt 1.1 has a preferred response (agreement) that is affirmed by the participant (an unmarked response).
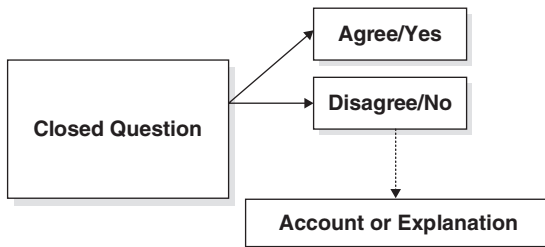
Excerpt 1.1

Interviewer (IR): This was for you to earn—to earn money?

Interviewee (IE): Yeah. Yeah.

Source: Interview of fiber artist James Bassler conducted by Sharon Emmanuelli, 2002.

FIGURE 1.1   ●   A Closed Question and Possible Ways of Responding

Interviewees may also respond to closed questions as if they were open by providing further description. For example, in response to a closed follow-up question preferring a yes/no response, the interviewee in Excerpt 1.2 provided further explanation rather than supplying a one-word answer.

Excerpt 1.2

IR: Were you in Havana proper?

IE: Yeah, it was in Havana. We were always in Havana. For a year or so, we lived in another town, but most of the time, we lived in Havana. It was a wonderful city and had lots of opportunities. My mother was able to get a job; my father got a job and then eventually had a business. So you know, it was a pretty good life.

Source: Interview of fiber artist Adela Akers, conducted by Mija Riedel, 2008.

In Excerpt 1.2, we see that even closed questions can generate explanations, rather than simple yes/no responses. Thus, while closed questions may imply yes/no responses they are not always taken up in that way. Still, it is wise for novice interviewers seeking to generate detailed descriptions of people's perceptions and experiences to learn how to pose open rather than closed questions. This should not be taken to mean that there is no place for closed questions in a qualitative interview. In Excerpt 1.2, a closed question is used to clarify a prior answer. Closed questions can be used judiciously by interviewers to confirm their understanding of details provided by interviewees.

Open Questions

Open questions provide broad parameters within which interviewees can answer in their own words concerning topics specified by the interviewer. Questions beginning "Tell me about . . ." invite interviewees to tell a story about the interviewer's research topic. Interviewers can explore descriptions by asking additional open-ended questions that incorporate the interviewee's words. For example, I have used the following questions to clarify topics and elicit further description:

You mentioned that you had _____. Could you tell me more about that?

You mentioned when you were doing, _____happened. Could you give me a specific example of that?

Thinking back to that time, what was that like for you?

You mentioned earlier that you_____. Could you describe in detail what happened?

In everyday conversation, we regularly formulate what others say to clarify our understanding of talk. Interviewers can easily use formulations as a basis for following up rather than using participants' words. When speakers formulate talk, they sum up what they have heard through a process of preserving, deleting, and transforming what has been said (see Heritage & Watson, 1979, and Appendix 2 for further information). When interviewers use formulations instead of participants' words to ask follow-up questions, they introduce words that the participants have not used. Interviewees can easily recycle the researcher's words rather than describing topics in their own terms, resulting in interviewers generating descriptions that reflect their own thinking. This is avoided when interviewers use the participants' words to generate follow-up questions. Excerpts 1.3.1 and 1.3.2 show two examples in which the interviewer formulated their understanding of prior talk, which is then repeated by the interviewee.

Excerpt 1.3.1

IE: So it was mostly concentrated on the weavers. So it was wonderful there.

IR: So that felt more productive?

IE: Yeah, it felt more productive.

Excerpt 1.3.2

IR: And these pieces do feel far more personal and narrative.

IE: Oh, yeah, definitely. They are very, very, much more personal.

Source: Interview of fiber artist Adela Akers, conducted by Mija Riedel, 2008.

Although in both of these excerpts the interviewer elicited agreement to these formulations from the interviewee, they did not elicit the participant's own descriptions of her feelings about her experiences and artwork. Rather, here the interviewee simply repeats the interviewer's descriptions. Although these are minor examples from a lengthy series of interviews, another way of responding to what had been said would have been to ask the open question: "Tell me more about that."

When asking open-ended questions, interviewers must be sure that the topic is sufficiently specific so that the interviewee will be able to respond. If topics have not been explained or are unclear to interviewees, they may have difficulty in answering broad, open-ended questions. When interviewees and interviewers both feel comfortable talking to one another, it can take as few as four or five interview questions with appropriate follow-up questions to generate talk of an hour or more. A possible sequence of open questions is illustrated in Figure 1.2.

FIGURE 1.2 ● An Open Question and Possible Ways of Responding
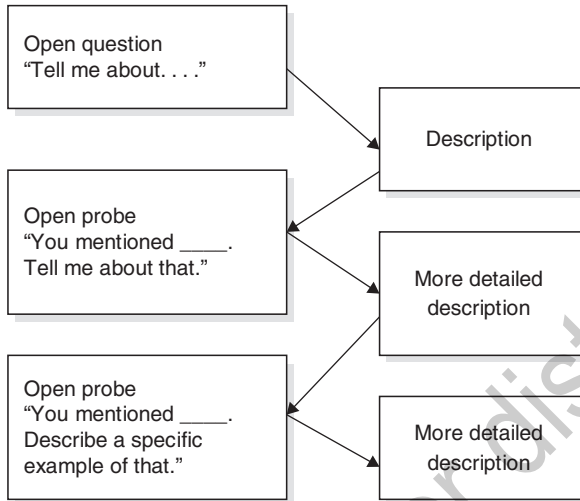
Structure and Interview Talk

Broadly speaking, research interviews for the purposes of social research range across a spectrum from structured, tightly-scripted interviews in which interviewers pose closed questions in specific sequences, to open-ended, loosely guided interviews that have little or no preplanned structure in terms of what questions and topics are discussed (see Table 1.1).

Working from left to right in Table 1.1., researchers using *structured interviews* invite participants to select their answers from options generated prior to the interview (see Foddy, 1993, and Fontana & Prokos, 2007, for more detail on structured interviews). Interview researchers using standardized formats work to follow scripts word-by-word. Conversation analytic studies of talk generated in standardized survey interviews suggest that this is challenging to do, given that interviewees can misunderstand questions and other interactional difficulties can occur (e.g., Houtkoop-Steenstra, 2000; Houtkoop-Steenstra & Antaki, 1997; Suchman & Jordan, 1990).

Semi-structured interviews are those in which interviewers use a prepared interview guide. Interviewers typically ask open-ended questions, seeking more detail about what interviewees say by asking follow-up questions. Although the interview guide provides the same starting point for each semi-structured interview and assumes a common set of discussable topics, interviews vary according to what individuals say and how each interviewer follows up. Interviewers using semi-structured interviews must listen carefully to judge if the research topics have been addressed by the interviewee and whether further description is needed.

TABLE 1.1 ● Range of Interviews		
Structured Interviews ↔	**Semi-Structured Interviews ↔**	**Unstructured Interviews**
The interviewer follows scripted questions in a particular sequence	The interview protocol is used as a topical guide and questions may not always be asked in the same order; the interviewer initiates topics by asking questions and poses follow-up questions in response to the interviewee's descriptions and accounts	Both interviewer and interviewee ask questions and discuss topics
The interviewee chooses responses from a range of fixed options that are coded quantitatively; responses are provided by researcher	The interviewee selects own terms to formulate answers to questions; answers are guided by the interviewer's questions	The interviewee selects own terms to participate in free-flowing conversation
Asymmetrical structure	Asymmetrical structure	Possibly less asymmetrical structure
Data analyzed via deductive analysis for hypothesis testing in multivariate studies*	Data analyzed via inductive analytic methods for descriptions and interpretations in interpretive studies, as well as other methods of analysis (see Chapter 9)	

Note: *Alford (1998) explains that multivariate arguments attempt to measure factors that explain a "particular social phenomenon" (p. 38) while interpretive arguments are those that "combine an empirical focus on the language and gestures of human interactions with a theoretical concern with their symbolic meanings and how the ongoing social order is negotiated and maintained" (p. 42). Interpretive arguments may also "focus on ideologies, discourses, cultural frameworks" (p. 42).

Researchers using *unstructured interviews* proceed with no formal interview guides. Interviewers ask questions in relation to ongoing ethnographic field work (i.e., participant observation) or engage in spontaneous conversations. Interviewers have research topics in mind and steer conversations toward topics of interest. In that interviewees ask questions of interviewers, who might divulge personal details and opinions, unstructured interviews can resemble ordinary conversation. Although unstructured interviews may appear to be less asymmetrical than structured and semi-structured talk, it is impossible to predict whether unstructured interviews will resemble free-flowing conversation.

Even as conversations can sometimes turn into arguments or interrogations, interactional challenges can still occur. A drawback of using an unstructured format for interviewing is that talk may not generate useful information since participants can introduce topics irrelevant to the researcher's interests. There is also the possibility that research participants can mistake informal interactions for ordinary conversations between friends. When speakers forget that they are engaged in data generation for a research project, ethical complications can occur when researchers represent information from intimate conversations in research reports. Multiple conversations on repeated occasions during extended fieldwork may be needed if researchers using unstructured interviews want to fully develop topics and aspects of analysis (see Lofland et al., 2006).

Interviews Used in Qualitative Research

While some social science researchers characterize their use of qualitative interviews in terms of structure—that is, structured, semi-structured, or unstructured—researchers often describe interviews in relation to the type of content they seek to elicit. In the next section, I review a number of forms for qualitative interviewing used in research. Each is used for different purposes. Some interview formats correspond to specific theoretical approaches to inquiry (e.g., phenomenological and decolonizing interviews) or methodologies and research designs (e.g., ethnographic interviews). Other formats (e.g., life history and mobile methods) are used in conjunction with a variety of theoretical approaches and research designs. Different interview forms might also point to particular approaches to data analysis and representation (discussed in more detail in Chapter 9). Suggestions for each interview format should not be taken as prescriptions for practice since qualitative researchers must exercise wisdom in applying principles of practice in each interview. In the following sections, I discuss the phenomenological interview; the ethnographic interview; feminist interviews; oral and life history interviews; the dialogic or confrontational interview; decolonizing approaches; object, graphic, and photo elicitation interviews; and go-alongs and walking interviews. I've selected these forms of interviews because they offer more nuanced approaches to interviewing than signified by the labels "semi-structured" or "open-ended" interviews. Although these interviews share some common characteristics, they have distinctive features in relation to the research purposes for which they might be applied.

Phenomenological Interviewing

Melissa Freeman (2021) reminded readers that phenomenological research seeks to understand "the sentient unfolding of an experience" as lived (p. 277; i.e., what are the feelings and sensations involved in a lived experience?). Put another way, philosopher and founder of phenomenology Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) focused on the "constitution of phenomena as they are experienced" (Freeman, 2021, p. 277). An example of Husserl's descriptive or transcendental

phenomenology in the field of nursing is a study of the essential structure of postpartum depression (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 731). As another example, Martin Heidegger's (1889–1956) hermeneutic or interpretive phenomenology was used in a study of women's subjective experiences during the acute stage of heart attack (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 732). Yet there are many more strands of phenomenological philosophy that have been applied to research beyond those of descriptive and interpretive phenomenology (Moran, 2000). For more information on concepts used in phenomenology, see Robert Sokolowski (2000).

Broadly speaking, for phenomenological researchers using interviews the unit of analysis is not individual experience, but rather the phenomenon itself. When informed by phenomenological theory, researchers aim to break from "the natural attitude" in which everyday lived experiences are taken for granted and not questioned. Freeman (2021) commented that phenomenologists examine questions that attend deeply to "the phenomena formed at the junctions between body and world, meaning and matter, experience and expression" (p. 277). Helena Dahlberg and Karin Dahlberg (2020), using Maurice Merleau-Ponty (who pursued what van Manen, 2014, called "embodiment phenomenology"), asserted that a philosophical approach to phenomenological research entails asking research questions about something that we already know in order to understand the *phenomenon* anew, while setting aside or suspending presuppositions and a naïve approach to the world.

When using interviews, phenomenological researchers aim to generate detailed, first-person descriptions of human experiences. Mark Vagle (2018) contrasted how the prepositions "of," "in," and "through" can be aligned with different phenomenological philosophies. According to Vagle, researchers studying the "of-ness" of a phenomenon follow Husserlian-oriented approaches (p. 39) directed toward examining an object of consciousness (i.e., transcendental phenomenology); researchers pursuing the "in-ness" of a phenomenon align with Heideggerian philosophies that explore intersubjective, contextual relationships with objects/subjects (pp. 42–43; i.e., hermeneutic phenomenology); and researchers examining the "through-ness" of a phenomenon in which the focus is on "becoming, production, and provocation" align with poststructural and new materialist approaches to research (pp. 43–46). Since there are many philosophical strands within the broader family of the theoretical perspective known as phenomenology, I encourage readers to explore the different forms that phenomenology can take and how interview data are subject to analysis (e.g., Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2014).

As already indicated, interviews will unfold differently depending on the phenomenological approach taken. When taking a phenomenological approach to interviews that focuses on generating descriptions of the essential qualities of an experience (i.e., transcendental phenomenology), researchers ask open questions such as this one:

Think of a time when you experienced _____ and describe that in as much detail as possible.

Possible follow-up questions include these:

You mentioned _____; tell me what that was like for you.

You mentioned _____; describe that in more detail for me.

To use phenomenological interviews effectively, the interviewer identifies participants who have both experienced and are able to talk about the particular lived experience under examination. Interview questions do not seek opinions or evaluations of the experience or accounts to do with how the experience relates to other aspects of the social world.

In keeping with these tenets of phenomenological inquiry, Catherine Adams and Max van Manen (2008) asserted that the focus of phenomenological interviews is to elicit the "direct description of a particular situation or event as it is lived through without offering causal explanations or interpretive generalizations" (p. 618). Adams and van Manen distinguished between two interrelated forms of interview—the "phenomenological interview" that explores and gathers descriptions of lived experience and the "hermeneutic interview" that seeks to examine the "interpretive meaning aspects of lived experience material" (p. 618).

In terms of structure, the phenomenological interview is relatively unstructured and guided by a limited number of interview questions. For example, writing from the field of psychology, Constance Fischer and Frederick Wertz (1979/2002) stated that the questions used in their study of the experience of being criminally victimized included "what was going on prior to the crime, what it was like to be victimized, and what happened then. Questions were restricted to requests for clarification or elaboration of what the victim had already said" (p. 279). The purpose in this study was to explore the existential meanings of being criminally victimized. Interviewers can also conduct multiple interviews with each participant. For example, Irving Seidman (2012) described a phenomenologically informed interview sequence in which the interviewer conducted three separate 90-minute interviews over a 2- to 3-week period.

The interviewer takes a neutral but interested stance in phenomenological interviews. Max van Manen (1990, 2014), who has developed an approach to phenomenology called the "phenomenology of practice," described the interviewer–interviewee relationship as pedagogical, in that the interviewer is a student of the interviewee, learning as much about the topic of inquiry as possible through sensitive questioning. In the phenomenological interview, the interviewer must listen carefully, follow up on participant's responses without interrupting the story flow to gain specific details of the participant's experience, and exercise reservation in contributing to the talk. This would usually mean refraining from evaluating or challenging the participant's responses (e.g., "That's a great story!" or "Did that really happen?"). In sum, in phenomenological interviews, as traditionally discussed, the interviewer facilitates a supportive, nontherapeutic environment in which the participant feels

comfortable to describe their life experiences in detail. Researchers informed by phenomenological theory use phenomenological reduction to analyze and represent the findings in the form of descriptions of the structures of meaning relevant to a lived experience (e.g., see Erica Goble's [2017] descriptions of experiences with the sublime in encounters with images and Karin Dahlberg's [2007] study of loneliness).

Some researchers draw on open-ended forms of interviews like phenomenological interviews to gain detailed descriptions that may be subject to other forms of analysis, such as narrative analysis and constant comparative analysis. These interviews are not necessarily theoretically informed by phenomenology and would be more accurately described as "open-ended" or "narrative" interviews since the research purpose is not phenomenological in intent.

The Socratic-Hermeneutic Inter-View

Christine Sorrell Dinkins (2005) provided an alternative form for phenomenological interviewing called the "Socratic-hermeneutic inter-view." Because interpretation is very much part of interviewing, Dinkins also referred to this as an "interpre-view." In the interpre-view, the interviewer and interviewee (referred to as "co-inquirer") "engage in a dialogue through questions and responses that encourage the researcher and co-inquirer to reflect together on the concepts that are emerging and taking shape within the interview itself" (pp. 112–113). Dinkins referred to a central focus of hermeneutics—that of examining the process of understanding and interpretation. Drawing on the hermeneutic phenomenology of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002) and Martin Heidegger, Dinkins rejected the neutral stance taken by phenomenological researchers seeking detailed stories about specific experiences. Instead, Dinkins discussed using a Socratic method of inquiry in which speakers question one another in order to clarify understandings and develop insight concerning research topics. In this kind of dialogue,

> Socrates puts himself very much into the inquiry. He expresses surprise when an interlocutor says something he didn't expect, he challenges beliefs that seem to conflict, and he acknowledges his own assumptions and allows them to affect the dialogue. He is never passive, and he never simply asks a question and lets the answer lie. (Dinkins, 2005, p. 116)

Although the kinds of research questions posed may be similar to those of other phenomenological studies, the way in which the interview proposed by Dinkins will unfold differs from the phenomenological interview described in other methodological texts. It is worth exploring some of the concrete suggestions that Dinkins draws from Socratic dialogues that might be used to generate data for phenomenological and hermeneutic inquiries.

Similarly to Socratic dialogues, the interpre-view begins with defining terms. The interviewer first asks the research participant to define the phenomenon that is the focus of the investigation. Like Socrates in his dialogues, interviewers

will make use of analogies to help interviewees think about difficult questions and clarify what they believe and mean by terms used; use examples to explore the co-inquirer's descriptions; highlight conflicting statements in an effort to have participants explore meanings; reformulate co-inquirers' statements to identify potential misunderstandings on the part of the researcher; and ask participants for their ideas about ideal and actual experiences. Dinkins (2005) proposed that the structure of this kind of interview involves a back-and-forth process of "continual reexamination" that resembles Heidegger's hermeneutic circle (pp. 137–140). Finally, in the Socratic-hermeneutic inter-view, or interpre-view, interpretation is seen to be part of the interview process itself, rather than taking place after the interview when the researcher analyzes data and writes a report. Dinkins suggested that the interpretations are likely to be incomplete or lacking in resolution, with interviewees having gained insights about their experiences that they reflect on further and researchers being left with more questions to ask (pp. 142–143).

As we can see here, traditional models of interviewing are subject to continuous revision. Researchers suggest alternatives and innovations—some of which draw on ancient understandings and practice. It is useful to think of the various forms of interviews described in this chapter not as fixed practices, but flexible forms that researchers take up, alter, and reformulate to align with the theoretical presuppositions upon which they base their work.

Ethnographic Interviewing

Interviewers conduct ethnographic interviews to explore the meanings that people ascribe to actions and events in their cultural worlds and how they express that in language. In ethnographic interviews, participants describe aspects of their cultural world, including space, time, events, people, activities, and objects (Spradley, 1979). Researchers examine the "folk" terms and language that participants use to describe their culture. Drawing on his ethnographies (Spradley, 1970; Spradley & Mann, 1975), anthropologist James Spradley described how to develop and conduct ethnographic interviews in fieldwork (Spradley, 1979). Conducted alongside participant observation (Spradley, 1980), a key difference between the ethnographic interview and a conversation is that the researcher introduces "ethnographic elements" to "assist informants to respond as informants" (Spradley, 1979, pp. 58–68). Because of the conversational style, ethnographic interviewing appears to be unstructured. Yet ethnographic interviewing relies on the researcher's ongoing analyses of data generated via field notes of observations, participation in the research settings, development of rapport with informants, and multiple interviews over time.

Although ethnographic interviews may resemble everyday conversations, the researcher pursues specific topics. Spradley (1979) classified questions as (1) descriptive, (2) structural, and (3) contrast. In the early stages of ethnographic fieldwork, the researcher focuses on asking open-ended questions aimed at gaining participants' descriptions of space, time, events, people, activities, and

objects. Spradley described five different kinds of descriptive questions that can be asked of participants to get at the details of participants' cultural worlds. The exemplar questions provided in Box 1.1 are drawn from James Spradley's (1970) study of men who had been arrested for public drunkenness and Spradley and Brenda Mann's (1975) study of the world of a cocktail waitress.

After data generated from early interviews are analyzed, structural and contrast questions can be generated for additional interviews. The researcher asks questions to verify or disconfirm hypotheses generated from preliminary data analysis. This process aids researchers in systematically checking their understandings of what participants have said and refining ongoing analyses and interpretations of data.

There is some debate as to what counts as ethnographic interviewing. Some researchers who claim to have used ethnographic interviews do not engage in extensive fieldwork, nor do they engage in analyses with the purpose of gaining an understanding of how people use language and make meaning of events and objects in specific cultural settings. Rather than use the term "ethnographic

BOX 1.1
TYPES OF DESCRIPTIVE QUESTIONS

1. Grand-tour questions

    Could you describe the inside of the jail for me?

2. Mini-tour questions

    Could you describe what you do when you take a break at Brady's Bar?

3. Example questions

    "I was arrested while pooling"—Q: Can you give me an example of pooling?

4. Experience questions

    You've probably had some interesting experiences in jail; can you recall any of them?

5. Native-language questions

    How would you refer to the jail? (Spradley, 1979, pp. 78–91)[1]

Source: Reprinted by permission of Waveland Press, Inc., from Spradley, *The Ethnographic Interview,* Waveland Press, Inc., © 1979; reissued 2016, all rights reserved.

[1] I have included only one example of each of the five kinds of description questions here. Spradley provides many subcategories for each of these that are worth reviewing by those seeking to do ethnography.

interviews" as a loose synonym for qualitative interviews in research studies that do not entail ethnographic fieldwork (e.g., Atkinson, 2015; Coffey, 2018; DeWalt & DeWalt, 2002; Lofland et al., 2006), I encourage novice researchers to consider how their use of ethnographic interviews aligns with or challenges the ethnographic traditions that have been developed in the fields of cultural anthropology and qualitative sociology.

Data generated from ethnographic interviews are analyzed in a number of ways, including ethnographic analytic methods such as domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, componential analysis (Spradley, 1979, 1980), grounded theory methods (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), or a more open process Harry Wolcott (1994) called "transforming qualitative data." Given the emphasis on culture and symbolic meaning, many studies also make use of symbolic interactionist theory as an interpretive lens.

Researchers using ethnographic interviews frequently participate in the settings that they study. For example, sociologist Matthew Desmond (2016) combined participant observation and interviewing in his study of the eviction process in Milwaukee, digitally recording conversations with participants. He asked questions during the course of everyday life in the trailer park and boarding house where he lived for a time, as well as conducting interviews with landlords and others involved in evictions. Similarly, Mark De Rond (2017) used ethnographic interviews with staff in a surgical unit in Afghanistan as one form of data to answer what it is like to work in a field hospital during war. While not discussed here, scholars using critical approaches to research (including but not limited to critical race theory, LatCrit, and critical feminisms) also use participant-led conversations and ethnographic interviews as a way to explore people's experiences of oppression and their perspectives of institutions and policies.

Feminist Interviewing

The label "feminist interviewing" developed in the 1970s and 1980s when feminist researchers used open-ended, intensive, and unstructured interviews as an alternative to the social scientific standardized survey (see DeVault & Gross, 2007, for examples). Sociologist Ann Oakley's (1981) article "Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms" was one of a number of critiques arguing that social scientific inquiry and methods such as the standardized survey alienated and objectified women and reinforced patriarchy (see also Finch, 1984). At the same time, feminist researchers promoted the development of a sociology for women, and feminist standpoint theory emerged (Harding, 2007; Reinharz, 1992; Smith, 1987). For some feminist researchers, this meant exclusive use of qualitative research methods, such as ethnography, participatory methods, and unstructured interviews, while others argued that this has ultimately hindered feminist causes (see, for example, Oakley, 1998, 2000). In her much-cited 1981 article, Oakley recommended strategies for feminist interviewing, including establishing intimacy and openness through self-disclosure

on the part of the researcher and engaging in continued relationships with research participants beyond the conclusion of the study.[1]

Writing on feminist interviewing in the 1980s and early 1990s conceptualized open-ended interviews as promoting a context for developing egalitarian relationships among researchers and participants conducive to producing knowledge about unstudied facets of women's lives. Instead of asymmetrical relationships in which researchers reserved the right of topic selection and asked questions speaking to their own interests, feminists argued for a feminist interview that promoted equitable relationships between researchers and participants, in which the participants contributed to the research agenda and topics discussed and contributed their viewpoints in the course of a study (e.g., Lather & Smithies, 1997). Some argued that, for particular topics, only women interviewers could interview women (Reinharz, 1992, pp. 23–26).

Other scholars have problematized these positions and pointed out that the shared category of *woman* does not mean that researchers can generate meaningful data from women who ascribe importance to other category positions (e.g., race, class, status, or sexual orientation among others) or that interactions in interview contexts will go smoothly (see, for example, Best, 2003; Johnson-Bailey, 1999; Kezar, 2003; Naples, 1996; Riessman, 1987; Tang, 2002). Sandra Harding (2007) has highlighted "futile strategies" that fail to support feminist work well. These include use of "empathy, careful listening, or 'going native'" in an attempt to erase the power differentials inherent in the researcher-researched relationship (Harding, 2007, p. 53), use of confessional subjectivity statements to locate the position of the researcher in relation to the topic and research participants, and attempts to omit "theoretical or conceptual input into the research process itself" by simply recording women's voices (p. 54). Although these strategies relate to research more generally, they are frequently mentioned in feminist interview research. Harding's critiques provide cautionary reminders to researchers taking a feminist approach to interview research. These critiques of feminist practice provide productive avenues for development of feminist methods.

Sociologist Marjorie DeVault (1990) has outlined strategies to engage with participants in respectful and ethical ways. These involve language-use both within the interview setting and beyond, as the researcher represents others in research reports:

- Employ the terms and categories that women use in their daily lives rather than the "topics established by the discipline" to explore "incompletely articulated aspects of women's experiences" (DeVault, 1990, pp. 100–101).

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[1] Oakley (2016) has reexamined the contribution and critiques of the 1981 article through returning to talk with participants of the earlier study. In the 2016 article, she asserts that the concept of the "gift" and friendship are deserving of further consideration.

- Listen carefully to how women construct their accounts to explore "ambiguity and problems of expression" to fill in "what has been incompletely said" (p. 104).

- Consider how women's speech is represented to portray participants respectfully (p. 109).

- Represent research so it is understood by audiences new to feminist work (p. 112).

Feminist qualitative researchers have embraced the use of semi-structured interviews, unstructured, in-depth, and open-ended interviews (Reinharz, 1992), life history interviews (e.g., Behar, 1993), and focus groups (Wilkinson, 1999). While some prefer to use the label "feminist interviews" to describe their methods, for others this is implicit in the design and conduct of the study as a whole. Interview research framed as feminist makes frequent use of open-ended questions and multiple, rather than one-off interviews. Readers may be asking the question: Given that feminist interviewers use semi-structured and unstructured interviews, what distinguishes the feminist interview from other kinds of qualitative interviews? As in other areas of scholarly research, there is considerable debate about this question (e.g., DeVault & Gross, 2007; Harding, 1987). In her review of 4 decades of writing on feminist interviewing, Brigette Herron (2020) identified five phases of writing among feminist researchers who use interviewing in research to advance women's causes. These include a focus on (1) experience and voice, (2) difference and positionality, (3) power sharing and collaboration, (4) creativity, listening, and reflexivity, and (5) ethics of care and safety in analysis and representation.

Harding (2007) advised feminist researchers to guard against the colonizing effects of social science research at each stage of the research process: from selecting the research problem and designing the study, through conducting the research, interpreting, representing and disseminating findings (p. 54). Herron (2020) provided recommendations for feminist scholars in an era of postfeminist sensibilities in which feminist work can be mistakenly equated with man-hating. These recommendations include the following:

1. Develop deep understanding of feminist work that has come before.

2. Understand the current moment and feminist political concerns.

3. Be open to revisions and trying new combinations to inform feminist, justice-oriented, and woman-centered work.

In summary, unlike phenomenological and ethnographic interviews, feminist interviews do not employ particular ways of asking questions or structuring interviews, although oral history, life history, focus groups, and semi- and unstructured interviews have been used. The distinguishing feature of feminist

interviews is that they are used for the purpose of doing feminist work and contributing to the advancement of women's causes in a patriarchal, capitalist society. Rather than reproduce the exploitive relationships of traditional forms of social scientific research, feminists aim to work with participants in respectful and ethical ways that allow women's voices to be heard.

Ongoing scholarship shows that the self-reflexive critique with which feminist work has long been identified has produced insightful findings about how interview interaction is accomplished and how we might use interviews for feminist purposes (e.g., DeVault & Gross, 2007; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). The emphasis on reflexivity associated with feminist scholarship (Wilkinson, 1988) has become characteristic of qualitative research more broadly. Above all, in writing on feminist interviewing we see a focus on the relationships that researchers strive to develop with interviewees—those that are ethical, nonexploitive, sincere, and genuinely interested in free and open dialogue with women participants. An example of the use of a feminist approach to interviewing is Lilian Cibils's (2017) study of how Latina immigrant women navigated their relationships to the school system in the southwest United States.

Oral History Interviewing

Oral history involves collecting oral narratives from ordinary people to document peoples' lives and past events and contribute to historical accounts. Historian Linda Shopes (2011) outlined six characteristics of oral history: (1) Interviewers frame the storytelling by asking questions; (2) interviews are recorded and made accessible to others; (3) oral histories contribute to understanding the past; (4) narrators' accounts interpret events rather than record "facts"; (5) oral history interviewing involves deep inquiry to generate detailed descriptions of the participant's experiences in (6) spoken words (pp. 451–452). Numerous terms are used synonymously with oral history. These include life story, biography, personal narrative, and memoir (Yow, 2015). What distinguishes oral history from other forms of interview?

Whereas researchers typically erase audio and video recordings of qualitative research interviews (this is negotiated with ethical review boards), oral historians usually transcribe, index, and archive interviews in libraries and museums for public access. Participants must sign a legal release form to allow for archiving of the interview and access to others. The internet has enabled community groups who have recorded people's stories and the history of local events and activities to widen accessibility to others outside the vicinity of a collection, and digitized collections are becoming more common. Two examples show the range in oral history collections. The 9/11 Memorial and Museum in New York City has collected more than 1,000 interviews from first responders, survivors, family members, and others affected by the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and Flight 93, which crashed in a field in Pennsylvania, on September 11, 2001. As another example, StoryCorps is a

born-digital collection of thousands of stories told by ordinary people across the United States and the world.

One historian, William Moss (1977/1996), argued for the need to use other forms of evidence in conjunction with oral histories in order to construct "good history" (p. 113). What Moss was referring to is the need to verify information provided by interviewees in order to construct realist accounts. Researchers pursuing realist accounts verify details by checking and comparing information from interviews with historical evidence such as the following:

- *Transaction records* such as laws, contracts, deeds, wills, treaties, diplomas, certificates, licenses, patents, proclamations, orders, instructions, advertisements, and so forth (Moss, 1977/1996, p. 109)

- *Contemporary descriptions,* including audio and video recordings of events, still photographs, or running descriptions (e.g., from broadcasts; p. 109)

- *Recollections* in the form of diaries, stories told by grandparents to children, information gained from eyewitnesses by investigators, and information from other oral history narrators (pp. 110–111)

- *Reflections* in which narrators simultaneously recollect events and actions from the past and make these relevant to the present (p. 112)

- *Accounts* by historians, journalists, writers of government reports, and others that have involved careful and critical examination and comparison of records (p. 113)

While historians such as Moss argue that doing oral history interviews involves verifying the information provided by interviewees, others disagree. David Dunaway (1996), for example, stressed the interdisciplinary nature of oral history and commented that the fourth generation of oral historians draws on postmodern and critical theories and makes use of modern technologies (p. 7). Shifts in theoretical perspectives used by historians have meant a move from "presenting facts as received wisdom to presenting theoretical analyses as specific to a given time and place and society" (Dunaway, 1996, p. 9). For example, feminist researcher Delores Delgado Bernal (1998) used oral history interviews to generate stories and memories of women's experiences of the East Los Angeles Blowouts, which occurred in 1968 when thousands of students walked out of schools to protest inferior educational opportunities. Delgado Bernal (1998) stated that "I was used to my grandmothers' storytelling in which absolute "Truth" was less important to me than hearing and recording their life experiences" (p. 571). As a second example, Charmaine Williams (2019) used critical oral history methods in a community-based participatory project to explore lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans (LGBT) human rights issues in the Caribbean.

Life History Interviewing

Oral history and life history interviews are similar but not the same. Whereas oral history draws on oral traditions of storytelling to generate histories of events and communities, researchers using life history interviews explore a broader array of research questions. Ardra Cole and Gary Knowles (2001) defined life history inquiry broadly, commenting that this kind of research aims to understand the

human condition by coming to know and understand the experiences of other humans. It is about understanding a situation, profession, condition, or institution through coming to know how individuals walk, talk, live, and work within a particular context. (p. 11)

The life story interview allows an individual to tell their story "from childhood to the present" (Ritchie, 2003, p. 40). Robert Miller (2000) explained how the terminology has changed, commenting that *life story* originally referred to "the account given by an individual about his or her life" (p. 19). When validated by external sources, the story was called a *life history*. With the influence of narrative work, Miller argued that life history came to mean "a series of substantive events arranged in chronological order" (p. 19), although validating the factuality of accounts was no longer a requirement.

Life history research typically involves talking to small numbers of participants over a lengthy period of time. Oral history can involve larger populations, particularly when the purpose is to archive recollections of specific events or groups of people. For example, in the United States, the Federal Writers' Project undertook oral history interviews across 17 states during the 1930s with thousands of people born into slavery (Musher, 2014). Many of these are available digitally from the Library of Congress.

Given that researchers often conduct biographical research with older people, interviewers are likely to schedule multiple meetings to allow participants time to reflect and recount their stories, and interviewing can take many hours. Life history researchers make use of multiple forms of data—including interviews, field notes of observations, and documents and artifacts (Cole & Knowles, 2001). For example, Karen Ross (2017), a scholar who studies peacebuilding, used life history interviews with ethnographic methods (participant observation and document analysis) as a way to explore participants' worldviews, beliefs, life experiences, and any changes that they attributed to their engagement in two encounter groups in Israel (Peace Child and Sadaka Reut; p. 69). As a second example, Valerie Janesick (2019), professor emerita of educational leadership and policy studies, discussed the use of letters, diaries, reflective journals, and poetry to supplement interviews in her life history research with two female superintendents of U.S. school systems. As mentioned earlier, researchers do not necessarily use multiple sources of data to verify facts as described by some oral historians. Rather, in life history, researchers typically explore participants' sensemaking practices. As Yvonna Lincoln and Michael

Lanford (2019) pointed out, the "reality as constructed may be malformed (e.g., racist) or misinformed (e.g., stereotyped)," but is still revealing of a life trajectory as narrated in retrospect (p. 466).

Dialogic and Confrontational Interviewing

In the approaches outlined previously, with the exceptions of oral history interviews in which the interviewer is advised to ask challenging questions of interviewees in order to pursue topics when necessary (Ritchie, 2003) and the interpre-view proposed by Dinkins (2005), interviewers typically take nonadversarial roles with interviewees. Journalists' encounters with politicians show us how interviewers can take confrontational and combative roles. Descriptions of research interviewers who purposefully take oppositional roles with interviewees are sparse in the social science literature. Since researchers rely on the goodwill of people to engage in social science research and there are limited direct benefits for research participation, this is unsurprising. Yet some researchers have discussed how participants resist the interviewer's role by "fighting back" and disagreeing with assumptions embedded in interview questions. Researchers have also discussed how to initiate dialogue and perhaps even arguments in their conversations with research participants. A dialogic approach to interviewing, then, is one in which interviewers purposefully aim to bring into being new understandings of topics in conversation with interviewees. Such conversations do not avoid conflict (Freeman, 2011).

Svend Brinkmann and Steinar Kvale (2005) outlined a contrasting perspective to "warm, empathic, and caring interviews," that, they argue, neglects "real power relations" (p. 170). According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2005), alternatives include these:

- The psychoanalytic interview in which the therapist intervenes on behalf of the client by actively creating conflict (p. 171)

- The Platonic dialogue in which speakers provide "reciprocal critique of what the other says" (p. 171)

- Agonistic interviews in which the interviewer "deliberately provokes conflicts and divergences of interests" (p. 172)

- Dissensus research, which exposes the arguments of opposing sides (p. 172)

- Advocacy research, in which representatives of different positions in a social setting (e.g., managers and workers, teachers and students) "critically interpret the texts, and potentially, as in court, cross-examine the witnesses" (p. 172; see also Kvale, 2006)

These models of interaction are very different to the interview formats outlined earlier in this chapter. While some of Brinkmann and Kvale's suggestions are clearly not research interviews (e.g., Platonic dialogues, or therapeutic

psychoanalytic interviews), these researchers seek to purposefully introduce challenge in interviewer–interviewee interaction for the purpose of social research. In the following paragraphs, I examine these proposals in further detail.

Writing from the field of psychology, Brinkmann (2007) has forwarded the idea of "epistemic interviews" inspired by Socratic dialogues as an alternative to nondirective interviews informed by the therapeutic model advanced by Carl Rogers. The purpose of Socratic dialogues was to move conversationalists "from a state of being simply *opinionated* to being capable of *questioning* and *justifying* what they believe is the case" (Brinkmann, 2007, p. 2, emphasis in original). Brinkmann (2007) has extended Holstein and Gubrium's (1995) notion of the active interview—in which interviews are viewed as interactional and interpretive—to propose interviews as a site to *develop knowledge* as well as *convey experience* (p. 4). An example used by Brinkmann in his argument for epistemic interviews is that of Pierre Bourdieu et al.'s (1999) *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*. In one of the cases presented, Bourdieu interviewed two young men from the north of France, openly challenging them to justify their accounts (Bourdieu et al., 1999, pp. 64–76). Bourdieu referenced a Socratic notion of dialogue in his discussion of interviews, stating that it is the interviewer's responsibility to offer

> the respondent an absolutely exceptional situation for communication, freed from the usual constraints (particularly of time) that weigh on most everyday interchanges, and opening up alternatives which prompt or authorize the articulation of worries, needs or wishes discovered through this very articulation, the researcher helps create the conditions for an extraordinary discourse, which might never have been spoken, but which was already there, merely awaiting the conditions of its actualization. (Bourdieu et al., 1999, p. 614)

Brinkmann cautioned that epistemic interviewing is neither suitable for all research purposes nor certain interviewees. The use of epistemic interviews rests on the researcher's interest in promoting interaction between interviewers and interviewees that seeks to foster public dialogue about topics. In dialogue, interested citizens—including the interviewer—must be willing to justify, argue, defend, and perhaps even change their accounts.

Similarly, Lene Tanggaard (2007, 2008) has outlined adversarial roles for interviewers and their participants, also building on Holstein and Gubrium's (1995) notion of the active interview. Tanggaard (2007) used the metaphor of "discourses crossing swords" in a "battlefield" to envision the "antagonistic character of conversations" and encounters that take place in qualitative interviews. Rather than a site of consonance and agreement between interviewer and interviewee, interaction is analyzable as a site of dissonance in which "discourses cross each other" (Tanggaard, 2008, p. 18). Both Tanggaard (2007, 2008) and Brinkmann (2007) have pointed to the possibilities of producing

more objective understandings of data when the dialogues produced and interpreted show how both interviewers and interviewees challenge one another and interpret topics within the interview interaction itself, rather than leaving interpretation as a sole feat performed by the researcher after the interview has been completed. Tanggaard and Brinkmann used Bruno Latour's (2000) notion of "objectivity" in which the subject of research is able to "object" to the researcher, just as objects of study in the natural sciences object to scientists' claims by "behaving in the most undisciplined ways, blocking the experiments, disappearing from view, dying, refusing to replicate, or exploding the laboratory to pieces" (p. 116).

Tanggaard's (2007, 2008) examples of interview interaction showed confrontational dialogue between interviewers and interviewees in which the interviewer asked leading questions and the interviewee disagreed and disputed the researcher's interpretations. Tanggaard (2008) asserted that knowledge is produced through confrontational interactions in which the interviewer and interviewee challenge each other's assumptions and inquire into one another's viewpoints. Brinkmann (2007) warned that ethical practice requires that interviewees must understand what they are participating in and argued that researchers can proceed ethically with epistemic interviews, given that they, too, take risks by participating fully in the dialogues.

Amy Way et al. (2015) provided practical strategies for researchers wanting to engage in dialogic interviewing. They suggest that dialogical interviews can facilitate spaces in which interviewers and interviewees can suspend preconceptions about the world, demonstrate openness to new perspectives, and abandon competitive viewpoints. Way et al. (2015) suggested the kinds of questions that a researcher might use to initiate dialogue with participants to prompt "flickers of transformation" in which people question and even change their understandings. Drawing on data from three studies in which the investigators did not intentionally set out to initiate transformation, these authors identified interview strategies that were associated with overt self-reflexivity among participants (p. 722). These are summarized in Table 1. 2.

Three caveats are needed to understand Way et al.'s approach to dialogic interviewing. First, the authors approached interviewing in a spirit of curiosity rather than combat. Second, the authors asserted that the strategies identified relied on extensive trust-building with participants over extended time periods. Third, they recommended that interviewers "develop a feel for participants" and trust their intuition concerning "when to engage in dialogic interviewing" (pp. 728–729).

Through the use of dialogic and confrontational interviews, researchers seek to generate data in which people make their reasoning practices and justifications explicit in the ongoing dialogue. Key questions concerning this kind of interview relate to how researchers might use this approach in an ethical manner in which participants are fully informed, what kinds of topics are best suited to this approach, and what analytic methods best represent the talk generated.

TABLE 1.2 ● Interactional Strategies That Accompany Participant Self-Reflexivity	
Strategies and Tactics	**Examples**
Probing questions	"Why?" or "Why not?"
Opinions	"Why do you think that is?"
Beliefs	"What do you think?"
Resisting problematic formulations	Avoiding finishing participants' sentences.
Member reflections	Repeat participants' words back to them.
Mirroring	"You were about to say . . .?"
Calling out	Expressing understanding of/agreement with participants' opinion/point of view.
Reassurance	
Counterfactual prompting	"If you had a magic wand, what would you change about the situation?"
Magic wand	"Can you imagine what it might be like . . .?"
Imagining opposite	"What might be the advantages/disadntages of such a perspective?"
Empathic consideration	"What might be the benefits/challenges for that person?"

Source: Way et al. (2015). "Dialogic interviewing and flickers of transformation: An examination and delineation of interactional strategies that promote participant self-reflexivity" p. 729. Reprinted by kind permission from SAGE.

Decolonizing Interviews

As will be discussed in Chapter 3, researchers using decolonizing methods have critiqued Western research methods for the ways in which they recolonize and objectify Indigenous peoples (Blair, 2016; Cole, 2017). In contrast, scholars draw on Indigenous traditions and Native ways of knowing to conduct research that is decolonizing. Related to interviewing, this might entail talking circles among Native American groups and First Nations people in Canada (Pedri-Spade, 2016; Tachine et al., 2016) and "yarning" among Indigenous people in Australia and Botswana (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Blair, 2016). In order to ask questions of members of Indigenous groups, researchers using decolonizing approaches must understand the cultural contexts and norms of behavior among the groups with whom they are researching. A researcher's use of interviews must be grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing and being, rather than seeking to apply interview methods used in traditional social science research. I will discuss decolonizing and Indigenous approaches to interviewing in more detail in Chapter 3.

Object, Photo and Graphic Elicitation Interviews

In interviewing, researchers also augment interview guides by asking interviewees questions related to material objects, still and moving images, or drawings, diagrams, and timelines that they have asked participants to create. These interviews are variously referred to as object, visual, photo, and graphic elicitation interviews. Interviewers ask participants questions related to these reference materials within ethnographic, phenomenological, feminist, life history, or other forms of interviews.

Object interviews and photo elicitation. Interviewers sometimes ask questions of interviewees in relation to artifacts, objects, and visual images. For example, Mette Abildgaard (2018) conducted oral history interviews using telephones commonly used in Denmark from 1950 to 2000; Sophie Woodward (2016), in the initial stage of her study of material culture, asked participants during life history interviews questions to do with old jeans; and Susan Nordstrom (2013) used object interviews to understand the connections that participants made with their ancestors. Nordstrom described the objects as including documents, photographs, and other artifacts, including an American Civil War era bullet and Navajo baskets. Nordstrom's use of the object interview takes in images as a form of object elicitation. Catrien Notermans and Helen Kommers (2013) labeled their use of a set of 30 cards of iconographic images of Mary in their study of pilgrimage "iconographic elicitation." Woodward (2020) distinguished between the use of objects to initiate co-constructed dialogue and the use of objects to "draw out" narratives in object elicitation interviews. Objects—both those that the researcher brings to the interview and those that participants select to talk about—can be used as prompts to talk about the topic of inquiry. Just as some interview questions are more effective in generating talk, some participants may find it easier to talk about a topic when particular objects are incorporated into a conversation. This may not always be the case, however.

Photo elicitation typically makes use of images generated by participants. For example, using a mixed-methods design, Sophia Becke and Stephan Bongard (2018) combined photo elicitation with participant observation in their study of attachment in middle childhood in the Cameroon. Becke and Bongard gave children disposable cameras to take photos of people who were important to them and with whom they felt safe and comfortable. The interview phase involved researchers asking ethnographic questions of the participants in which they sought explanations for how the persons photographed made the children feel safe, comfortable, and at ease. Yet participants of photo elicitation projects have also challenged researchers' use of this method. In their study of place in a village in the English Midlands, Katy Vigurs and Helen Kara (2017) reported that participants oriented to the instructions to take photos of their village in different ways. While older members of the ladies' choir elected to take few photos and instead brought artifacts and images that they selected from their own collections, members of the youth bus group took

photos of one another rather than places. In response, the researchers worked with the younger group to have them talk about space in relation to a map of the village and used the artifacts and images that members of the ladies' choir had brought to generate talk.

In contemporary times, researchers are less likely to use disposable cameras since this technology has been replaced by digital devices. Researchers are more likely to invite participants to share photos that they take on their personal mobile devices. Just as interviewees need guidance as to what topics will be discussed in an interview, researchers will need to provide instructions for participants concerning expectations for what to photograph and why. When explaining the purpose of a study and gaining informed consent from participants, researchers must also ensure that participants know what the photos will be used for and outline strategies for maintaining anonymity should any photos be used in presentations and publications from the study. I have not discussed *photovoice*, which is a specific approach to research that uses participatory approaches to research that typically involve exhibitions of participants' imagery, which may include still photos and/or videos. Additional references are found at the end of this chapter.

Graphic Elicitation. Graphic elicitation methods entail participants drawing timelines, diagrams, and maps, which are used as a way to organize and prompt discussion. Ana Barbeiro and Dario Spini (2017) discussed the use of the "calendar interviewing device," which assisted in organizing questions and answers on a timeline across different life domains (e.g., family life, work, education, and health; p. 84). This device generates data that can be analyzed via quantitative and qualitative methods and thus is useful to researchers using mixed-methods designs. Alison Bravington and Nigel King (2019) provided an overview of approaches to graphic elicitation involving diagrams. They asserted that generating diagrams can assist research participants in structuring their stories and organizing information and can enhance the complexity of storytelling. They organized diagramming into those that may be used to represent relationships between people, concepts, and tasks and those that represent sequential processes or events.

Vignettes. Although hypothetical vignettes are frequently used in survey research to generate responses concerning situations (e.g., sexual violence), they have also been used by qualitative researchers. Vignettes are stories and scenarios that depict events that participants are typically asked to discuss (for example, in research on sexual violence, researchers have used both hypothetical and data-based vignettes to explore people's understandings of sexual consent). Researchers formulate questions about the events depicted in vignettes that explore people's opinions, beliefs, and reasoning practices. Nicholas Jenkins et al. (2010) used vignettes to explore participants' interpretative practices and asserted that these can be used to understand interviewees' unquestioned beliefs about their lifeworlds (p. 192). Jukka Törrönen (2018) asserted that vignettes can be used as clues, microcosms, and provokers in qualitative

interviews since they invite interviewees to consider the topics discussed from a range of perspectives.

Mobile Methods

Ethnographers embedded in the cultural contexts that they examine have long walked side-by-side with participants while asking questions. This mobile approach to asking questions encompasses "go-alongs" (Kusenbach, 2018) and "walking interviews" (D'Errico & Hunt, 2019; Evans & Jones, 2011). Researchers might also incorporate mapping, photographs, video, and geographic information system (GIS) mapping and global positioning system (GPS) technologies.

Margarethe Kusenbach (2018) defined "go-alongs" as involving key characteristics. In Kusenbach's view, go-alongs are (1) place-based, (2) person-centered, (3) interactive, (4) systematic, and (5) symbolic. The term "go-along" does not confine mobility to walking but could also include running, bicycling, or traveling by bus, train, or other vehicles. Walking interviews, in contrast, engage interviewers and interviewees in talking while walking through a site of interest. Researchers may also take photographs (e.g., Chang, 2017) or generate maps (e.g., Flint, 2019). Peter Merriman (2014) cautioned researchers against assuming that the use of mobile methods will result in accessing more authentic or "real" experiences. Further, since the use of mobile methods highlights the "liveliness" of the body, researchers may fail to consider other ways of experiencing mobility (Merriman, 2014, p. 177). Mark Castrodale's (2018) account of his use of the go-along interview with members of the dis/ability community in Canada provides a cautionary tale. Some participants of his study did not want to participate in go-along interviews but preferred other options offered (i.e., sit-down interviews, email, or telephone interviews). Castrodale reported that go-along interviews can expose participants to oppressive conditions of built environments, as well as the disciplinary gaze of others. The lesson for researchers planning to use interviews is that careful thought needs to be given to what a particular approach to interviewing offers in relation to a study's purpose and how potential participants might be given choices concerning how interviews are conducted.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined different interview forms used by qualitative researchers. Beginning with an examination of question–answer sequences, I showed how research interviews are built on sequences of open and closed questions, usually arranged in semi-structured or unstructured ways. I then reviewed different interview formats, including phenomenological, ethnographic, feminist, oral and life history, dialogic or confrontational interviews; decolonizing interviews; augmented interviews that seek to elicit data using objects, artifacts, and images; and mobile methods such

as go-along and walking interviews. While each of these forms uses questions and answers, the research purposes differ. Phenomenological interviews are commonly used to elicit detail concerning descriptions of the essential characteristics of a lived experience. Ethnographic interviews are used by ethnographers studying questions to do with culture. A multitude of interview formats, including oral and life history, semi- and unstructured ethnographic, and phenomenological interviews have been used by feminist researchers as a way to contribute to work that benefits women. One way to think about the feminist interview is that it is conducted in a way that is consonant with the theoretical assumptions associated with the strand of feminist theory underpinning a researcher's work. Oral history interviews have been used by historians to construct historical accounts and contribute to public knowledge concerning events and people's lives. Life history interviews are used by researchers from a wide range of disciplines to capture the range of people's experiences in the examination of innumerable topics. Dialogical or confrontational interviews have been proposed by researchers as an alternative to "neutral" interviews that aim to elicit descriptions of individuals' psychological and interior states. Researchers forwarding dialogical approaches investigate participants' justification and reasoning practices, show how interviewers themselves are implicated in the production of research accounts, and instigate and examine public discourse and dialogue about research topics. Scholars informed by decolonizing approaches to research seek to elicit talk among Indigenous peoples in ways that align with traditional knowledges and Indigenous practices. Here, guidelines for practice must be drawn not from textbooks, but from elders within the communities in which researchers work.

Researchers also bring objects, artifacts, texts, and images to interview settings and involve participants in the generation of images such as drawings, timelines, maps, and photographs according to guidelines provided by the researcher or collaboratively developed with participants. In these sorts of interviews, objects, images, and texts guide the structure of storytelling and provide prompts for further talk. These methods have been used effectively to work with children, battered women, and people with illnesses, although these methods are by no means restricted to these kinds of populations (e.g., Clark-Ibanez, 2004; Frith & Harcourt, 2007; Frohmann, 2005). Finally, researchers explore space and place with participants as they go-along with participants in mobile interviews, or they ask questions while walking together. The approaches to individual interviews discussed in this chapter can be incorporated into many different research designs, including case studies, ethnographies, autoethnographies, and participatory designs. A particular research design does not, in and of itself, dictate a particular approach to interviewing. In the next chapter, I discuss joint and group interview formats and what researchers have learned about designing and conducting interview studies with multiple participants. I then discuss focus groups as one particular form of group format.

Further Reading

Overviews

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Practice

Select one or more of the following types of interviews in Activity 1.1 through 1.7 and practice interviewing another person. Audio record the meeting, aiming for a 45- to 60-minute interview. Follow the directions for each activity you choose. Complete Activity 1.8 for each interview you conduct.

Activity 1.1 Exploring Phenomenological Interviews

Arrange to interview a friend or relative about one of the topics listed:

- The experience of transformation

- The experience of joy

- The experience of frustration

- The experience of learning

You will need to check if your interviewee has had the kind of experience that you have selected before you start. If not, select another topic. One way to start the interview is to elicit a story using the following question:

Think of a time when you had a _____ experience. I would like you to tell me about that in as much detail as possible.

Here are possible probes that you can use to follow up on your interviewee's descriptions:

- You mentioned_____. Tell me more about that.

- You mentioned_____. What was that like for you?

- You mentioned that you_____. Walk me through what that was like for you.

Activity 1.2 Exploring Ethnographic Interviews

Consider a "cultural" group with which you are familiar. This might be a group that you belong to or a community in which you live. Using the exemplars of "descriptive" questions included in the section on ethnographic interviews in this chapter, formulate some questions that might be asked about group members' use of space and time or events common to the group, as well as people, activities, and objects.

Conduct a conversational ethnographic interview in which you pose questions to a member of the group in order to elicit descriptions of cultural knowledge. The ethnographic interview could entail observational activities and demonstrations of routine activities. For example, a member of a potters' group might demonstrate how they prepare clay for a project and describe the process orally. A resident of a retirement home might take you on a tour of the building while describing a "typical" daily routine.

Activity 1.3 Exploring Feminist Interviews

Using an unstructured format, interview a woman in order to elicit descriptions of her daily life. Consider how you might incorporate spaces for your interviewee to ask questions of you, as well as providing opportunities for her to steer the conversation toward topics of interest to her.

Activity 1.4 Exploring Oral History or Life History Interviews

Interview a person you know in order to gain descriptions of a significant event that has taken place in the community in which you live. If possible, search for other kinds of data that might be used to complement the interviewee's narrative, including photographs, newspaper accounts, and historical records. Try to elicit descriptions that answer questions concerning who, what, where, when, how, and possibly why. Potential topics might relate to the extreme events (e.g., floods, droughts, or storms) or community events (e.g., workers' strikes, building projects, celebrations).

Activity 1.5 Exploring Dialogic Interviews

Select a topic that is currently of public interest. Make a note of the issues related to the topic that you might discuss with another person. Explain your interest in facilitating a "dialogue" concerning this topic with a participant. In your dialogue, ask questions that call upon your participant to justify their opinions and clarify their understandings. Make sure to let your participant know that they can question you and call on you to explain your viewpoints and defend your statements.

Activity 1.6 Exploring Object, Graphic, Photo Elicitation, or Vignette Methods

Select an experience or activity of interest. Develop guidelines for your participant for any of the following:

- Taking cell phone photos to do with space or place

- Selecting and bringing an object of value to the interview

- Drawing a timeline or map of life experiences related to the research topic

In the interview, generate questions that relate to the photos, objects, or graphic elicitations provided by the interviewee. For a vignette-based interview, develop several narratives that depict events related to a topic of interest. Develop an interview guide that asks the participant about their opinions and perspectives of what happened and what characters in the narratives did.

Activity 1.7 Exploring Walking Interviews

Select a space or place of interest to talk about the participant's viewpoints related to the environment. Using a recording device, conduct an interview while walking around the space. Pose questions to do with the natural and/or built environment through which you walk. Your walking interview might be supplemented with photos or maps that you or your participant has drawn.

Activity 1.8 Debriefing Questions

- Which interview format felt most comfortable to you as an interviewer? Why?

- Which interview format felt most uncomfortable to you as an interviewer? Why?

- What did you notice about interviewees' responses to your questions?

- What did you notice about your responses to interviewees?

- Is there anything you would change about the way you conducted your interview? If so, what? Why?