

CHAPTER 4

Making Words Fly: Developing Understanding through Interviewing

Memory

*Spinning up dust and cornshucks
as it crossed the chalky, exhausted fields,
it sucked up into its heart
hot work, cold work, lunch buckets,
good horses, bad horses, their names
and the names of mules that were
better or worse than the horses,
then rattled the dented tin sides
of the threshing machine, shook
the manure spreader, cranked
the tractor's crank that broke
the uncle's arm, then swept on
through the windbreak, taking
the treehouse and dirty magazines,
turning its fury on the barn
where cows kicked over buckets
and the gray cat sat for a squirt
of thick milk in its whiskers, crossed
the chicken pen, undid the hook,
plucked a warm brown egg
from the meanest hen, then turned
toward the house, where threshers
were having dinner, peeled back
the roof and the kitchen ceiling,
reached down and snatched up
uncles and cousins, grandma, grandpa,
parents and children one by one,
held them like dolls, looked
long and longingly into their faces,
then set them back in their chairs
with blue and white platters of chicken
and ham and mashed potatoes
still steaming before them, with*

*boats of gravy and bowls of peas
and three kinds of pie, and suddenly,
with a sound like a sigh, drew up
its crowded, roaring, dusty funnel,
and there at its tip was the nib of a pen.*

Ted Kooser, "Memory," from *Delights & Shadows*. Copyright © 2004 by
Ted Kooser. Reprinted with permission of Copper Canyon Press,
www.coppercanyonpress.org.

Think of interviewing as the process of getting words to fly. Unlike a baseball pitcher whose joy derives from throwing balls that batters never touch, you toss questions that you want your respondents to "hit" and hit well in every corner of your data park, if not clear out of it—a swatted home run of words. As a researcher, you want your "pitches"—your questions—to stimulate verbal flights from the important respondents who know what you do not. You want to tap into memories of "good horse, bad horse, their names" as described in Ted Kooser's poem. From these flights come the information that you transmute through the "nib of your pen" into data—the stuff of dissertations, articles, and books.

Getting words to fly is the subject of this chapter. It is a simple matter to express: Develop a clearly defined topic; design interview questions that fit the topic; ask the questions with consummate skill; and have ample time to "pitch" the questions to forthcoming and knowledgeable respondents. As with pitching balls, however, the process of creating good interviews takes practice.

INTERVIEWING: AN INTERACTION

What type of interaction is an interview? An interview is between at least two persons, but other possibilities include one or more interviewers and one or more interviewees. Interviewing more than one person at a time sometimes proves very useful: Children often need company to be emboldened to talk and some topics are better discussed by a small group of people or a *focus group* as discussed later in this chapter.

In conventional approaches, researchers ask questions in the context of purposes often important primarily to themselves. Respondents answer questions in the context of dispositions (motives, values, concerns, needs) that researchers need to unravel in order to make sense out of the words that their questions generate. The questions, typically created by the researchers, may be fully established before interviewing begins and remain unchanged throughout the interview (*structured interviews*). Questions may emerge in the course of interviewing and may add to or replace pre-established ones (*semistructured interviews*). Questions may develop on the spot through dialogue and interactions with only the research focus leading the way (*unstructured* or *conversational interviews*). Generally, qualitative researchers begin with some interview questions and remain open to reforming and adding to them throughout the research process—the scenario for advice in this chapter.

The questions you bring to your interview are not set within a binding contract; they are your best effort before you have had the chance to use them with a number of respondents. However much you have done to create useful questions, you should think of them tentatively, so that you are disposed to modify or abandon them, replace them with others, or add new ones to your list or *interview schedule*. The more fundamentally you change your interview schedule, however, the more frequently you may have to return to people whom you thought you had finished interviewing in order to ask them questions that emerged in interviews with others. In general, it is not advisable to say final good-byes to respondents; leave the door open to return.

Interviews can figure into a research project in different ways. In the positivist tradition, they can be the basis for later data collection, as in the form of a questionnaire. Not knowing enough about the phenomenon of *interest*, researchers interview a sample of respondents in the hope of transforming what they have learned into the necessary items and scales. Also in a positivist vein, interviews are sometimes used as a validity check of the responses given to questionnaire items. For example, what do respondents mean when they select “strongly agree” or “strongly disagree” as their response to some item? Probing in depth with a small sample of respondents who account for what they meant when they disagreed or agreed can indicate whether different respondents perceived the question in reasonably similar terms, as well as what underpins their reactions to it. In the interpretivist tradition, the interview can be the sole basis of a study, or it can be used in conjunction with data from other methods such as participant observation and document collection.

Given the face-to-face nature of ethnographic research, you may ask questions on the many occasions when something is happening that you wonder about. You inquire right then and there without formally arranging a time to ask your questions. Semistructured interviewing, in contrast, is a more formal, orderly process that you direct to a range of intentions. You may want to learn about events or experiences that you cannot see or can no longer see as is done through oral and life history interviews. Jan Myrdal (1965), in *Report from a Chinese Village*, reconstructed—through oral history interviews with many people—the transition in rural China between the passing of Chiang Kai-Shek’s regime and the ascendancy of Mao Zedong. In a more recent example, Alan Wieder (2004) elicited testimonies of teachers in South Africa who fought apartheid. *Oral history interviews* focus on historical events, skills, ways of life, or cultural patterns that may be changing (Rubin and Rubin 1995). *Life history interviews* focus more on the life experiences of one or several individuals. Mary F. Smith (1954), in *Baba of Karo*, recreates—through life history interviews—the life of a Nigerian woman of the Hausa tribe.

Both oral history and life history interviews are examples of focusing on concepts of culture. “In cultural interviewing, researchers learn the rules, norms, values, and understandings that are passed from one generation of group members to the next” (Rubin and Rubin 1995, 168). Questions in cultural interviews ask people about their memories, experiences, and understandings of events in their lives.

Oral and life history interviews can also be a kind of witnessing that challenges and counters the "official story" as they document voices silenced or ignored by mainstream culture (Wieder 2004). Observation puts you on the trail of understandings that you infer from what you see, but you cannot, except through interviewing, get the actor's experiences and explanations.

Instead of interviewing about past experiences and events in people's lives, you might want to interview in search of opinions, perceptions, and attitudes toward some topic, for example, asking teachers their opinion about state-mandated changes in the middle school science curriculum. How do they perceive the impact of the changes on their work as teachers? What is their attitude about this impact? Concerned about the utility of the state's curricular mandate, you might conduct interviews to obtain data that will be instrumental for understanding teacher conceptions of science and obstacles to implementing proposals for reform. This would be a form of *topical interviewing* that focuses more on a program, issue, or process than on people's lives.

The opportunity to learn about what you cannot see and to explore alternative explanations of what you do see is the special strength of interviewing in qualitative inquiry. To this opportunity add the serendipitous learnings that emerge from the unexpected turns in discourse that your questions evoke. In the process of listening to your respondents, you learn what questions to ask.

DEVELOPING QUESTIONS

Question Content

What is the origin of the interview question? In ethnographic research, the experience of learning as participant observer often precedes interviewing and is the basis for forming questions. The things you see and hear about the people and circumstances of interest to you therefore become the nuggets around which you construct your questions. Of course, participant observation does not and cannot always precede question making. What then? Turn to your topic and ask, in effect: If this is what I intend to understand, what questions must I direct to which respondents?

Novice researchers sometimes confuse their research questions with their interview questions, thinking that they can modify their research questions to produce their interview schedule. "Your research questions formulate what you want to understand; your *interview* questions are what you ask people in order to gain that understanding" (Maxwell 1996, 74). Although there should be a relationship between research and interview questions, interview questions tend to be more contextual and specific than research questions. And their development "requires creativity and insight, rather than a mechanical translation of the research questions into an interview guide" (74).

The questions you ask in ethnographic inquiry should be anchored in the cultural reality of your respondents: the questions should be drawn from the

respondents' lives. When Sarah interviewed student teachers about their classroom practices, she knew what to ask because she had both sat in their prepractice teaching methods class and later watched them perform in their own classrooms. But she also could have known what to ask by having taught a teaching methods class and supervised student teachers. In both cases, she could enhance the experiential foundation from which she generated questions by talking with others in the know, such as former student teachers and supervisors of student teachers, as well as by reading the relevant literature and acquainting herself with theories in the field.

The theory, implicit or explicit, underlying some behavior is an important source of questions. Daren, for example, planned to investigate what he called "the returning dropout," young people who dropped out of high school but later returned to study in an adult education program. Daren's questions originated from his knowledge of the literature and from his reasoning. Over time, they were modified by pilot testing and through consultation with other researchers and informants. They reflected theoretical considerations regarding his topic. He asked, for example,

1. For what reasons did returnees leave school in the first place? (suggests a connection between leaving and returning to school)
2. How did parents react to their decision to drop out? (suggests the likelihood of a parental role in leaving and returning)
3. Did they have friends who also dropped out? (suggests that peer influence could motivate leaving and returning)
4. How did they learn about the adult education program? (suggests the possible influence of the source of knowledge about the program)
5. In what ways were treatment of students and contents of instruction different in the adult program than in the high school program? (suggests the appeal of some particular features of the adult program compared with the high school program)

These discrete questions do not amount to a theory; they do, however, point toward an understanding of the complex phenomenon of returning to school, which is a precursor to theory. In short, with the answers Daren received from each of his returning dropouts, he advanced his ability to explain why dropouts return to school.

Theoretical assumptions of your methodological approach also shape the questions you ask. A theoretical assumption of ethnography, for example, is that, although highly variable and context specific, social behavior reflects patterns of a culture and that it is possible to discern and interpret these patterns. This assumption guides the ethnographer in asking interview questions about the ways in which people do things and the kinds of experiences and attitudes people have as well as of the meaning they make of some behavior or perspective. In comparison, a theoretical assumption of narrative inquiry is that people's narratives or stories about something "is a natural, obvious, and authentic window into how people

structure experience and construct meaning in their lives" (Schram 2006, 105). This and other theoretical perspectives of narrative inquiry lead the researcher to focus on eliciting complete stories through interviews or to record the stories in the setting where they occur naturally. A poststructuralist theoretical assumption about interviewing is that if interviewers take a neutral stance, "they create a hierarchical, asymmetrical (and patriarchal) relationship in which the interviewee is treated as a research 'object'" (Rapley 2007, 19). This perspective suggests that the researcher engage with participants in cooperative projects that focus on dialogue, collaboration, and mutual self-disclosure. To sum up, the questions you ask say much more about you, the interviewer, and your theoretical perspectives than might be obvious at first glance. This chapter focuses on ethnographic interviews.

The Mechanics of Question Development

Todd, interviewing parents about their perceptions of portfolio use as a means of assessing their child's performance in school, stated, "I found I spent 45 seconds explaining each question, so I had to work to simplify them." Researchers often begin with questions that make perfect sense to them, but are less clear to their research participants. Michael Patton (2002), in his chapter on interviewing in the text *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, has some of the best advice around concerning the development of good interview questions. He talks about kinds of questions, urging the researcher to ask questions from a variety of angles.

Kinds of questions that Patton (2002) describes include experience/behavior questions, opinion/values questions, feeling questions, knowledge questions, sensory questions, and background/demographics questions. Experience/behavior questions are generally the easiest ones for a respondent to answer and are good places to begin to get the interviewee talking comfortably. Knowledge questions, in contrast, can give the impression of being tested. Respondents can readily feel embarrassed or at least uneasy when they have to say "I don't know" to a question that you assumed they would know. If a knowledge question is information that can be obtained from documents or from one person in the know, such as the department chair, get the information there and drop the question from your interview list for all respondents.

Patton (2002) also reminds us that we can ask our questions of the present, past, and future. Questions that ask for hypothetical musings about the future, however, tend to provide data that is neither "thick" in description, nor very useful during data analysis. The question, "How would you like the sports medicine clinic to be in 10 years' time?" generates little other than a wish list. Exceptions exist, of course, but the past and present tend to be richer ground for stories, descriptions, and interviewer probes.

"How a question is worded and asked affects how the interviewee responds" (Patton 2002, 353). Not only must you think about different kinds of interview questions, but also you need to work carefully with shaping the question as Todd discovered in his portfolio interviews with parents. Look through your questions and rework any that are dichotomous yes/no questions ("Do you participate in

volunteer activities?") because such questions guide your respondent to give short answers. Rethink multiple questions ("Tell me about the last time you volunteered, how long you worked at the activity, and how you felt about doing so") because your respondent will most likely talk more fully about one of your several questions and forget the others. "Why" questions ("Why do you do volunteer work?") can also be problematic because each respondent might answer from a different perspective, even though he or she could speak to several (Patton 2002). As researcher, you want to investigate the primary categories or perspectives with all respondents. For example, one interviewee might answer why she does volunteer work with a discussion of childhood experiences. Another might talk about his need to give something back to the community. Yet another might report how volunteer work puts her in contact with people she would not be with otherwise. As a result of your "why" question, you will generate a list of reasons for participation in volunteer activities, but your understanding of volunteer work might grow even deeper if you asked each respondent about the role of family socialization, moral beliefs, and perceived rewards in his or her participation in volunteer work.

One kind of question to think about using is the *presupposition question*, a question in which the interviewer presupposes "that the respondent has something to say" (Patton 2002, 369). Novice interviewers often perceive the need to begin with a short-answer question such as, "Are you satisfied with your volunteer work?" followed by the more open-ended questions: "In what ways are you satisfied?" and "In what ways are you not satisfied?" You can often presuppose that satisfaction (or some other attribute) is a part of the work and begin with a statement such as "I'm going to ask you now about your satisfaction and dissatisfaction with your volunteer work. Let's begin with the ways in which it is satisfying for you."

Presupposition questions are useful. Leading questions are not. It is sometimes easy to confuse the two. In leading questions, the interviewer makes obvious the direction in which he or she would like the answer to go. Imagine if you began a question with the following, "It often seems that many people are focused on themselves, never thinking about environmental problems, homelessness, or poverty except as they, individually or possibly as a family, are affected. What does volunteer work mean to you?" If the question was asked in this way, could a respondent easily tell you that he spent spring break with Habitat for Humanity because his girlfriend had signed up to go? A presupposition question might, in contrast, presuppose that there are ways in which volunteer work is and is not meaningful (satisfactory, useful, etc.) to the respondent, but it does not lead the interviewee to answer in any specific way.

The following discussion is drawn from a study that Kelly Clark (1999) conducted with women academics who were among the first generation in their working class families to attend college. Her questions are examples of types of questions that can be raised for qualitative inquiry. They also demonstrate the importance of planning a series of interviews with the same person over time so that rapport can be established and time can be sufficient for learning from respondents.

Clark began with a question asking each woman what she does for work and to describe a typical day. Spradley (1979) refers to this type of question as a *grand tour* question, a request for the respondent to verbally take the interviewer through a place, a time period, a sequence of events or activities, or some group of people or objects. Grand tour questions are good starting points because they ask the interviewee for experiential detail that he or she can easily and readily answer.

A common mistake in interviewing is to ask questions about a topic before promoting a level of trust that allows respondents to be open and expansive. Therefore, Clark followed up her first question with another easy-to-answer question about the women's work: "How is it that you became involved in the work that you do?" The answers to this question allowed her to gently transition into the area she was particularly interested in learning about during the first interview session—the language used and feelings expressed regarding what it had meant and continued to mean to be a first-generation female academic. Clark planned to hold a minimum of three interviewing sessions with each woman. For the first session, she created questions that would reveal what the process of going to college had been like for each woman as well as reflective self-perceptions of why each had pursued the path she had. Questions for the second session were built on these interviews and probed into areas painful for some: the opportunities, choices, and systems of support that influenced each participant's individual and educational development. The final session was deeply reflective with questions designed to generate a detailed story of how each participant had gone about aligning a sense of self with higher education. By the second and third sessions, Clark could ask questions that would have been more difficult to ask in the first session because both rapport and the foundation for asking more complex, reflective questions had now been developed.

It's easy to pose questions that are too vague to elicit comprehensive responses. Asking "What was attending college like for you?" is so broad that a respondent might be tempted to either give a short-answer "okay" or launch into experiential stories that don't necessarily pertain to your interests. You can make such questions less vague by asking the respondent to recapture something by imagining it. Clark posed the following, "I'd like to have you go back to a time in your personal life that you've probably not thought about for some time. Remember when you were first introduced to the idea of going to college? There were likely many things you had to consider as the time drew nearer for you to spend your first day on campus. What did you imagine college to be like?" The idea is to provide mood and props for interviewees to recall something likely to be long unthought about. You want to ask questions that will cause them to recapture time, place, feeling, and meaning of a past event. Clark's next question continued to prompt for reflection upon events in the past as she asked, "Suppose I were present with you during one of your visits home. What would I see happening? What would be going on? Describe to me what one of those visits would be like."

Interviewees readily participated in answering Clark's questions because doing so caused them to reflect upon their actions and perhaps to put pieces of their lives together in ways that they hadn't done before. Because Clark had been a

first generation college student herself, by the third session, the interview became more conversational in tone with back and forth sharing of each other's lives. By the third session, she could also ask directly about each interviewee's life epiphanies—occurrences or realizations that "cut to the inner core of the person's life and leave indelible marks on them" (Denzin 2008, 120). It is these kind of personal experience stories that are often most meaningful for both interviewer and interviewee.

With some topics (e.g., controversial or very sensitive issues), it may not be as easy to get a respondent's personal opinion. In asking questions, you have a choice of voices, and thus of degrees of directness and generality. You can ask "do you," "do nurses like you," "do nurses at your hospital," or "do nurses in general." The scope of the voice increases with each example as, accordingly, the degree of personal disclosure decreases. Whenever you sense your questions to be too personal to be asked directly, you can expand the generality, and assume that the longer the respondent talks, the more likely he or she is speaking in a personal voice.

That some questions are designated as warm-up questions suggests that others are best asked at the end. When you are reasonably comfortable with the form and substance of your questions, give attention to their order. Which belong at the beginning because they are easy to answer and answering them will reassure respondents that your questions are manageable? Which belong at the beginning because they are foundational to what you will ask later, or because they will give you the time needed to promote rapport? Which questions should be asked in special sequence? Which should be kept as far apart as possible because you want to minimize how the answer to one question might affect the answer to another? Which should be asked at the end because they are of a summary, culminating, or reflective nature? For example, Cynthia Stuhlmiller (2001, 75–76) conducted interviews with rescuers in the 1989 earthquake in San Francisco, California, an emotional topic. Toward the end of each interview, she asked questions like "What did you learn about yourself from your encounter?" or "What advice would you have for others?" As she states, "this directed narrators to consider the positive or growth-promoting aspects of the experience and enabled such thoughts to linger after the interview." Of course, we all know what happens to the best-laid plans of researchers. Your logical order may be sundered by the psychological order that emerges from your respondents' answers. Not needing to keep things straight, as you see it, they may talk in streams of language that connect to various parts of your questions, but in no way resemble your planned order. You then learn new ways that your questions connect.

Revising and Piloting

View the pre-interview process of question construction as a continuing interaction between your topic and questions and collaborators whom you enlist to play several facilitative roles in this process.

First, think of the pre-pilot-testing period as a three-way interaction among the researcher, the tentatively formed topic, and interview questions—tentative

because in so thinking you are optimally open to what is known to be most realistic: that interview questions will change. Write questions, check them against your topic, possibly revise your research statement, and reconsider the questions.

Then, think of pre-pilot testing as a four-way interaction when the collaborators enter the picture. These collaborators or facilitators are your agreeable peers, who will read drafts of your questions in light of what you communicate as the point of your study. They bring their logic, uninvested in your study, to the assessment of your questions, and give you the basis for returning to your computer to create still one more draft. Such facilitators tell you about grammar, clarity, and question-topic fit. In addition, some facilitators may be informed by experience with the people and phenomena of your research topic and thus can ascertain if your questions are anchored in the respondents' cultural reality. No doubt, the most effective collaborators are the persons for whom your questions are meant. Your greatest challenge is to create questions that your respondents find valuable to consider, and questions whose answers provide you with pictures of the unseen, expand your understanding, offer insight, and upset any well-entrenched ignorance.

Finally, pilot your questions. Ideally, your pilot respondents are drawn from the actual group that you mean to study. Urge your pilot respondents to be in a critical frame of mind so that they do not just answer your questions but, more important, that they reflect critically on the usability of your questions. Since formal pilot studies are not always feasible, you might design a period of piloting that encompasses the early days of interviews with your actual respondents, rather than a set-aside period with specially designated pilot respondents. Such a period, if conducted in the right frame of mind—the deep commitment to revise—should suffice for pilot purposes. Sean, in reflecting on developing interview questions about the experiences of first-generation college students, observed.

It was the actual pilot interview phase that most clearly informed my interview questions. Which questions resonated with my interviewee, and which ones fell to the ground (both figuratively during the interview and literally during the coding of the interview)? It is also the point at which the experience of the first generation student leaves the crisp pages of research documents and becomes a responsive, interactive experience . . . one which says, "Huh?" at the end of a poorly worded question, or continues at length in response to a good one.

Be prepared to let some questions fall to the ground.

The example shown in Exhibit 4.1 is taken from the work Kristina did on her questions for interviews with African women about their perceptions of their legal rights as women. Presented here are only a few of her questions from each of her subsequent drafts, so you can get an idea of how her questions evolved through her dedication to making them good questions and through feedback from her professor, peers, and eventually several pilot interviews.

DRAFTS OF KRISTINA'S QUESTIONS

Draft 1, October 2

1. How would you describe the position of women in your country, both economically and socially?
2. I want to talk to you about any experiences you or your mother, or other women that you know have had, about owning property. How did you or the women you know gain property?
3. How did you come to understand what rights a married woman has compared to her husband?

Draft 2, October 9

In many countries around the world, women have inferior social and economic positions compared to men. This inferior position sometimes makes it difficult for women to exercise their rights in issues of marriage and property. I want you to describe first the rights women in your country face when it comes to marriage issues, and then we'll come back to the rights of women relating to property.

1. What kinds of rights do women have in your country around the issue of marriage?

Now I want to talk to you about issues relating to marriage. I'm going to divide this issue into two topics. First I want to talk about what rights a woman has when she is married, the kinds of things she can and cannot do, and rules or laws which may apply to a married woman. Then I want to talk about the same issues only concerning divorce.

2. What kinds of rules or laws apply to married women?

BRIEF COMMENTS ON EACH DRAFT

Draft 1

Notice how broad and general the first question is. Because it is such a large question, it would be difficult to know where to start in answering it.

Again, where does one start and with whom—you, your mother, or other women? And what is meant by "gain"? What is meant by "property"?

Question 3 is less broad than the others, but it still feels vague. How would you answer it?

Draft 2

These preliminary words, an attempt to be more conversational in her approach, clearly state Kristina's position and could silence or lead women to answer in certain ways.

Question 1 remains quite broad and vague and asked at a general level rather than engaging the women in discussing their own experiences.

Kristina's preliminary to the next questions is a worthwhile attempt to be more conversational and to alert the women to what kinds of questions are to come, but the words "I want to talk to you about . . ." or "I want to talk about . . ." do not work to bring the interviewee into the interview. It is also difficult to follow all the information presented.

Question 2, like 1, is too broad, vague, and general.

(continued)

(continued)

3. What experiences have you had which helped you to understand what rules or laws apply to married women?

Draft 3, November 11

1. If you had to generalize and describe how women in your country live, what would you say?

Now I want to talk to you about issues relating to marriage. I'm interested in the sorts of rights a married woman has, the kinds of things she can and cannot do, what kinds of rules or laws apply to married women. These rights don't necessarily have to be actual laws but can be what is expected of a married woman.

2. What kinds of laws or rules apply to a married woman?

3. What do you think about these kinds of rules or rights?

Draft 4, November 18

I want to talk to you about your understanding of how women perceive marriage, divorce, and property rights in your country. I'm mostly interested in your perceptions of these issues, regardless of your knowledge about specific laws that apply to women. I'm going to break this interview into three sections beginning with marriage, then we'll talk about divorce, and finally we'll talk about women's property and inheritance rights.

1. I'd like you to tell me about the laws or customs concerning women and marriage in your country. How would you describe them? (probe for role of women, role of men, how roles have changed)

Question 3 finally gets at the woman's experience. Look at how this question seems more engaging than Question 3 of Draft 1.

Draft 3

Nice beginning, but again very broad and difficult to answer.

Kristina might say "Now I would like to hear about . . ." which situates her as the learner in the interview process. What she goes on to say is useful and clarifying information for the interviewee.

Question 2 continues to be asked at a general level, but the introduction makes it easier to think about an answer. Being a "knowledge" question, it could be regarded as an uncomfortable kind of test question by interviewees.

Question 3 is a nice follow-up, and, I suspect, where the interviewee information will become more interesting.

Draft 4

Nice, clear introduction that sets out the scope of the interview and specifies that Kristina wants to understand the women's perceptions, not their knowledge of their country's laws.

Question 1 is at a general level, but clear and direct with good prompts for areas in which to probe.

2. How were you raised to think about marriage? (probe for role of mother, father, friends, school, government programs)	Question 2 gets at the interviewee's socialization. It would prompt reflective, and, most likely, engaging answers.
3. What would you teach your children about women and marriage? (probe for differences between teaching sons and daughters)	Question 3 is an excellent question to get at the interviewee's values and opinions.

EXHIBIT 4.1 Example of Developing Interview Questions.

How a question is worded matters. Gubrium and Holstein (2009, 46) give examples of ways in which similar, but differently worded questions prompted different kinds of stories. "As you look back over your life, what are some of the milestones that stand out?" led interviewees to focus on various professional milestones. The question, "If you were writing a story of your life, what chapters would you have in your book," however, generated narratives drawn from the interviewees' overall life stories. On Kristina's part, the process of drafting and redrafting interview questions required time, thought, and effort. Her research benefited, however, with her later questions eliciting interesting and engaging information. The data you get are only as good as the questions you ask.

SETTING UP TO INTERVIEW

Where will you conduct your interviews? You need to find convenient, available, appropriate locations. Select quiet, physically comfortable, and private locations when you can. Defer to your respondents' needs, however, because their willingness is primary, limited only by your capacity to conduct an interview in the place that they suggest. If, for example, a location's lack of privacy dampens, if not defeats open discussion, or if its noise level precludes hearing, then the available site is not workable. If meeting where radios or televisions blare, your gentle request will generally suffice to get the sets turned off or at least down. An office set aside for the researcher on a regular basis is ideal for interviews with students conducted at school. Otherwise, you may have to use your creativity and move around, depending on the time of day—the lunchroom, auditorium, backstage, campus picnic table, and gymnasium are possible places. Teachers, counselors, and administrators are easier to meet because they have classrooms and offices.

When will you meet? "Convenient, available, and appropriate" apply also to the time of the interview. By *appropriate*, I mean a time when both researcher and respondent feel like talking. Again, however, you take what you can get and defer to the preferences of the respondent. School-based interviews usually follow a teacher's free-period schedule and a student's study-hall period. Barring these

class-time opportunities, before and after school and lunchtimes are other possibilities. Meeting counselors and administrators requires fitting into their schedules when free of appointments.

How long will your interview last? An hour of steady talk is generally an appropriate length before diminishing returns set in for both parties. There are exceptions, for example, when less time is available to the respondent. Take what you can get, while trying to promote regularity—of location, time, and length of interview—so that you can say to your respondent at the interview's end, "Same time and place next week?"

How often will you meet? This is a variable, depending upon the purpose of the interview. A life history interview, for example, could not be completed in an hour interview. Some have taken dozens of hours (Atkinson 2002). Even most topical interviews require multi-session interviews to obtain trustworthy results. Just how many will depend on the length of the interview schedule and interview sessions, the interest and verbal fluency of the respondent, and the probing skills of the researcher. You might say to your respondents, "I would like to meet with you at least two times, and maybe more, certainly no more than is comfortable for you. And you may—without any explanation—stop any particular session or all further sessions." Then, it is your challenge to make the interview experience so rewarding that having more than two sessions, if needed, is unproblematic to the respondents.

How many interviews should you schedule for any one day? Stan, a working graduate student, was interested in perceived effects by students and teachers of an innovative bilingual program. He negotiated release time from his work for one day a week for two months. During this time, he planned to collect his data. When he began interviewing, he set up back-to-back interviews, trying to schedule five or more people to interview on the day he was at the school. He came to me, frustrated with delays and last-minute changes made to his plans, but determined to complete twenty interviews on the four Fridays during that month. I empathized with his personal time-constraints, but suggested that he revise his data collection plans, somehow extending the period. The limited time spent at the site, no matter how hard he worked when he was there, would not do justice to his inquiry. By scheduling interviews back to back, he did not have time to reflect upon and journal about each interview after its occurrence and thereby learn from it before the next interview. With such a tight schedule, he was probably more focused on getting through his questions than on listening, probing, and learning new questions that he, perhaps, should be asking. In addition, his anxiety over time was likely to be noted by his participants and they might give him shorter answers to speed up the process. Although I have scheduled three interviews in a day, I tend to agree with Karen O'Reilly (2005, 143) when she says, "I doubt anyone could manage more than two in-depth interviews in one day, and even less than that if the interview is very long or intense."

Stan might, for example, consider the phone or email as a way to follow up on, or even conduct some of his interviews. If he and respondents have access to computers with cameras, they could also hold the interview online, through programs

such as iChat or Skype. Although conventionally perceived as not as ideal as face-to-face interviews, Internet-based interviews have some advantages (Meho 2006). They tend to be less costly than phone or face-to-face interviews, and they allow the researcher to access people from many different geographic areas and in politically sensitive or dangerous locations. Email interviewing has the additional benefit of decreasing the cost or time involved in transcription. It can also enable conversations with some groups that might not be as willing or able to participate in face-to-face interviews such as people with special characteristics (stroke survivors or those with speech impediments), the difficult to reach (executives), second-language speakers, or those who are particularly shy. If choosing to do interviews through email, you need to plan on multiple email exchanges over an extended period of time so that you can probe into responses, ask for clarifications, and follow new lines of thought.

RECORDING AND TRANSCRIBING

How will you note your face-to-face interviews? Whether by hand, audiotape, or videotape is a matter of your needs and the respondents' consent. It is not quite a toss-up as to whether you note by hand or tape recorder. With handwritten notes (or notes typed into your laptop computer), you are closer to being done writing when your interview is done; this is their distinct advantage. Also noting by hand is less obtrusive and less intimidating to some persons. But be aware of the message your respondent may deduce whenever you stop taking notes: the risky, "I no longer am noteworthy." You will also feel less in control of the interview when, as you handwrite notes, your attention is focused on the struggle to keep up with the respondent's talk (even knowing that this generally cannot be done), and you can only intermittently maintain eye contact and attend to all of the verbal and non-verbal cues that have bearing on your procedure. Interviewees may generally be patient and slow down, even wait for you to catch up if you explain your desire to note their words as fully as possible. Recording devices, however, provide a nearly complete record of what has been said and permit easy attention to the course of the interview.

Many persons will agree to the use of a tape recorder. Depending on the sensitivity of your topic and the unease of your respondents, you may want to wait until the end of the first session before you ask for permission to record. Recording devices require an electrical outlet; using batteries is acceptable but somewhat risky. Give due attention to the quality of your equipment. You don't need the added frustration of trying to decipher the words on the recording after your interview. Digital recorders have advantages over the older analog recorders in that they store data in a digital format that you can download as a sound file directly into your computer, making it easier to manage, store, and transcribe your interviews than when dealing with boxes of cassettes. Most recorders have built-in microphones, which are less effective than an external microphone; best of all are lapel microphones that can be attached to both researcher and respondent,

particularly if there is sound around your interview site or you are interviewing persons who are soft-voiced.

If you are recording a lot of interviews and using an analog recorder, you might want to borrow or rent a transcribing machine with headphones and a foot pedal for reversing and advancing the tape, so that your hands are free to transcribe. Also, the machine rewinds the tape a little when you stop it, so you don't miss the first word or two when you begin the tape again. Doing this by hand is frustrating. Lorna reflected upon her transcription process without a transcribing machine:

The worst problem was in transcribing the interviews verbatim. My initial attempts at home left me somewhat crazed; it took me about one hour to transcribe about ten minutes of conversation. In desperation, I hired someone to do this. However, the expensive transcriptions contained numerous "???", where the words were obscured. . . . I then had to go over the entire tapes to fill in missing parts of the interaction.

With technological advances, however, the transcription machine may soon be relegated to museums, next to mimeograph machines. If you have a digital voice recorder, you can download the interview recording to your computer. Free software helps you transcribe by allowing you to pause and restart the recording as you type the words into a text box (Gibbs 2007, 16). Although many qualitative researchers anxiously await the day when speech recognition software can transform all recordings into text, currently speech recognition software must be "trained" to recognize the voice of one person. What some researchers are doing, however, is a kind of simultaneous translation in which they use earphones to listen to the recording of an interview, pause it, and then speak the same words into their computer equipped with speech recognition software trained to their voice (Gibbs 2007; Mears 2009). Although such a system requires good equipment (and at least 1 GB of free space on the hard drive), repeating aloud each word of the interview could evoke thoughts and possible insights that simply typing the words would not. Carolyn Mears (2009) describes herself as a convert to voice recognition software, using it not only to transcribe, but also to "take notes" on texts she is reading. When she comes upon a paragraph that she might want to quote, she reads it out loud and the software types it into her document file. Some speech recognition programs to explore include Dragon NaturallySpeaking (for Windows), IBM ViaVoice (for Linux), and MacSpeech Dictate (for Mac).

When transcribing, it can be helpful in the long run to type (or state) the first name of the interviewee in ALL UPPERCASE, followed by a colon, every time she or he begins speaking. Not only can you see the name easily this way, but also you can search forward for parts of a specific interview (Gibbs 2007). If doing sensitive research (learning about drug use), then you need to make your references to participants anonymous from the beginning. If your research involves something less sensitive (principals' attitudes toward tenure for teachers), then it might be easier to use the interviewee's real first name until all data are collected. Then a

pseudonym list can be compiled and you can search forward and replace real names with their pseudonyms. Some researchers use initials or even a number for names of interviewees, but, for me, this creates more distance between the interviewer, interviewees, and readers than pseudonyms.

How much you transcribe varies with research approaches and goals. If doing traditional ethnography, focused on cultural patterns and understandings, you can leave out most of the um's and somewhat ignore pauses and overlaps in conversations. If doing narrative ethnography or conversational analysis, however, you will want to transcribe in a way that shows pauses, overlaps, silence and the details of struggling for the right word (Gubrium and Holstein 2009). Also particularly important for narrative ethnography and conversational analysis is inclusion in the transcription of the interviewer's questions and prompts.

Whatever means can be afforded to minimize the agony of transcribing tapes—for analog transcribing, estimate five-plus hours per ninety-minute tape done by an experienced transcriber—should be seized. The good times of data collection can quickly pall if the transcribing doldrums set in. Reflect carefully on your needs. Replay your tapes on the way home from interviews. Browse through tapes and judge, given your purposes, how and how much you need transcribed.

Regardless of the means you select to record your interview, keep an account for every interviewee that includes the following: questions covered; old questions requiring elaboration; where to begin next time; special circumstances that you feel affected the quality of the interview; reminders about anything that might prepare you for subsequent interviews; and identification data that at a glance give characteristics (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, experience, occupation) that have bearing on your respondent selection. These identification data allow you to monitor the respondents you have seen, so you can be mindful of whom else to see. Review your notes, listen to the tapes, and transcribe as soon after the interview as possible. In these ways, you also gain some idea of how you are doing as an interviewer, what you need to improve, what you have learned, and what points you need to explore further. If you wait until you have completed all of your interviews before hearing your tapes (or reviewing your notes), then you have waited too long to learn what they can teach you.

After you have transcribed about three interviews and have entered enough fieldnotes into a computer file (each with date, time, and place, of course), a peculiar phenomena occurs. Paranoia sets in that something will happen to your data. Someone will steal your computer. Your apartment or house will burn down. Or you'll just wake up one morning and it's not there. All have most likely happened. It's best to back up your files. Rather than disks, invest in a compact Flash drive or memory stick or a removable hard drive. These are more secure and easy to use. What you need to remember, however, is that each time you back up your files, you need to add the date to the file name. This prevents confusion later on if you need to use your backup. You might want to keep the compact Flash drive with you (I use a zippered pocket in my purse) so that, if something happens to your computer, your Flash drive doesn't disappear as well.

THE NATURE OF INTERVIEWING

Conducting interviews is well within the capacity of most researchers, although it is clearly true that some people take to it naturally and readily get better and more proficient. Others take longer to become adequate interviewers, particularly in learning how to probe and how to wait with silence.

Interviewing is not quite the same process for all its practitioners, any more than teaching, nursing, or counseling is. Its variability derives from who is conducting the interview with whom, on what topic, and at what time and place. Interviewing, in short, brings together different persons and personalities. Gender, race, nationality, sexual orientation, age, and all their possible combinations, can make for very different interview exchanges. Depending on the topic discussed, the location of the interview, and the temper of the times, the nature of the interaction will change as well. If you are a European American researcher interviewing a Mexican American official of the Mexican American Political League on the subject of farm workers, in the League's business office, during the heated times of a strike, you will conduct an interview that is imaginably different from one you would conduct if you are a Mexican American researcher, interviewing the same officer, on the same subject, in your office, at a time when labor peace prevails.

But even if all variables were the same and just the researcher of the same gender, race, etc. changed, the interview process could be expected to be observably different—albeit possibly equally good, for there is no one person who is exactly the right interviewer, any more than there is a “right” practitioner in the case of teachers, nurses, or social workers. Each researcher has personal strengths and weaknesses that form the basis of his or her interview style. Just as in non-research life, some persons engender nearly instant trust; they can safely ask direct, probing questions on hot topics early in an interview relationship. Some can make blunders and get excused over and over because they are eminently forgivable. Some create such an atmosphere of reflection and nurturance that respondents line up to be interviewed by them. Learn who you are, how you operate, and make the best of it. Do not expect the same reception from all respondents. They will take to you as variably as people do in general. This means that you will conduct some wonderful interviews, and others may not be helpful at all. Of course, your unsuccessful interview encounters should not always occur with the same type of person.

Interviewing is a complex act. In the early days of interviewing it might be easier to conclude, “This is not for me” than to exult, “I have found my niche!” Because there are so many acts to orchestrate, effective interviewing should be viewed the way that good teaching is: You should look for improvement over time—for continuing growth—rather than for mastery or perfection.

A number of things occur simultaneously in interviewing. First and foremost is your listening. Interviewers are listeners incarnate; machines can record, but only you can listen. At no time do you stop listening, because without the data your listening furnishes, you cannot make any of the decisions inherent in interviewing: Are you listening with your research purposes and eventual write-up fully in mind, so that you are attuned to whether your questions are delivering on your intentions for them? If they are not, is the problem in the question, in the

respondent, or in the way you are listening? Has your question been answered and is it time to move on? If so, move on to what question? Should you probe now or later? What form should your probe take? Do you need to probe further the results produced by your probe? Have your questions been eliciting shorter and shorter if not monosyllabic returns, suggesting irritation with the topic or tiredness? The spontaneity and unpredictability of the interview exchange precludes planning most probes ahead of time; you must, accordingly, think and talk on your feet, one of those many interview-related skills that improves with practice.

You listen and you look, aware that feedback can be both nonverbal and verbal. You observe the respondent's body language to determine what effects your questions, probes, and comments are having. Do you see indicators of discomfort, and is the source of that discomfort in the physical conditions of your interview site or in the topic to which you are stimulating a response? Do you see signs of boredom, annoyance, bewilderment? What might be their source and their remedy, and is it within your means to find a remedy? Dick wrote in his log of causes that were beyond his control:

I arrive at school on a day when classes have been called off because of a power outage at 7:30 A.M. on a cold winter day. The principal is afraid because it came back on some time afterward, but not before she had made the decision to call off school. Parents will be angry because they had to make alternative arrangements for child-care when the child could have been in school.

Dick needed to decide whether to proceed as planned with his interview.

Although listening and looking are critical, you forgo their gains unless you remember. You want to remember your questions so you won't constantly look down at your list, and so you won't be taken off guard when your questions are being taken out of order. You want to remember what has been said—by you and your respondent—in this session and in previous ones. You want to recall what you have heard, so that you can pick up on past points in order to make connections, see gaps and inconsistencies, avoid asking some questions, or rephrase other questions when you know that your first attempt at questioning fell short of your expectations and needs. You must of course remember to bear in mind your research purpose so that what you are listening to is being assessed in respect to your research needs.

You must also remember your responsibility for the quality of the respondent's experience. Are you attending to aspects of the interview that make it not just agreeable but interesting for the respondent? Your respondents' contentment derives from the satisfaction of talking with you, even if the topic stirs difficult memories. How satisfied respondents are can affect their willingness to continue to talk to you, the effort they put into their talk, and what they may tell other interview candidates about being your interviewee. Narrative research has brought attention to how stories are always told in collaboration, even during interviews:

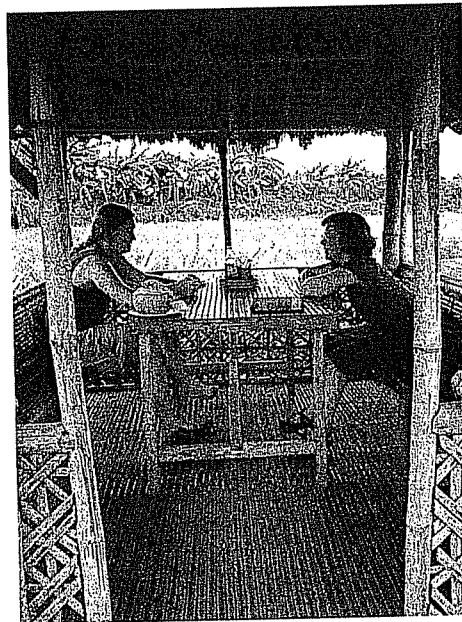
No matter how minimal, collaboration should not be discounted. Indeed, sometimes declining to participate in conversational give-and-take can put an end to a storyline; an apparent lack of attention or interest can put a damper on any

story. Conversely, measured participation may also facilitate storytelling, essentially allowing the narrator to command the floor in order to produce the extended turn at talk needed to formulate a story. (Gubrium and Holstein, 2009, 97)

When you are an interviewer, try thinking of your role as that of a conversational partner or collaborator whose conversational actions facilitate others in the telling of their stories.

Related to the quality of the respondent's experience is remembering to monitor your negative emotions. Unless involved in collaborative research projects that focus on learning through dialogue, you usually need to keep in check your disagreement with "disagreeable" views you may hear. When Bonnie learned through interviewing a nurse that her interviewee was seriously uninformed about the care and treatment of older, confused patients, she could not vent her irritation to the nurse and still maintain access. The venting may be acceptable and consistent with Bonnie's role as a nurse, but not with her role as a researcher. Keeping roles separate is hard but sometimes essential if you mean to collect data from people whose experiences and perspectives differ from yours. Moreover, you may be disappointed with the quality of your respondent's answer; nonetheless, you don't express this disappointment and rather look for positive means to improve the quality of your respondent's answer.

Finally, remember to keep track of time when interviewing in time-conscious cultures. Then, time remains for you to make some usefully culminating statements, such as, "Here's the ground we covered today. I was pleased to learn about



Interviews do not have to take place in sterile, formal settings. Make use of opportunities that allow you to learn from and with others in multiple places.

such and such. Would it be okay for next time if we went back to this and that point before we turn to the next subject?" In this way, you review and pave the way for your next interview session. You keep track of time so you can keep your promise to talk only for an hour and avoid overstaying your welcome or causing interviewees to be late for their next commitment. Take the time to negotiate and verify details of your next meeting, and be punctual for each appointment.

Listening, looking, and remembering in the comprehensive terms suggested here require developing your concentration. This means shutting off the myriad other aspects of your life so that you can fully attend to the needs of your interview. Achieving the appropriate level of concentration can be physically and emotionally draining, particularly in your early days as an interviewer. It is not excessively far-fetched to say that if you are not tired at the end of an interview session, then you might wonder about the quality of the session.

INTERVIEWER ATTRIBUTES

The following attributes do not ensure high-quality interviews; they are simply useful attributes to consider as you embark on research involving interviews. To what extent you must master these attributes, which ones have primacy, or which others may be substituted depends on you and the interview situation. Each attribute completes the sentence "The good interviewer is . . ."

ANTICIPATORY

As a good interviewer, you look ahead and ask, "What does the situation call for?" Some of the specifics about what to anticipate already have been mentioned. Your research summary is an example, in which you consider both what you must say in order to present yourself and your project cogently, and how what you say may vary from situation (pediatricians) to situation (the parents of children diagnosed with autism). What materials and equipment do you need to assemble for your interview session? If meeting a person for the first time, what do you already know and how might you learn more about the person before the interview? Who should you see next, in light of what you have been learning and not learning, and what arrangements need to be made to set up the next interviews? Anticipation feeds off the results of taking stock, an activity that might well be included at the end of the day in the daily task of field journal writing. Reflecting on each day is preparatory to anticipating what is next, both broadly in terms of your inquiry, and narrowly in terms of your next day's activities.

A LEARNER

Naïve characterizes the researcher's special learner role. It entails a frame of mind by which you set aside your assumptions (pretensions, in some cases) that you know what your respondents mean when they tell you something, rather than seek explanations about what they mean. Often, the hazard is that

your research is on a topic about which you may know a great deal through study and personal experience. What you know is the basis for the assumptions that preclude you from seeking explanations and that shut down your depth-probe inclinations. If you second-guess your respondents, then you forego the chance to say, "Tell me more." The difficulty of being a learner is that assumptions generally are useful for simplifying relations with others. In your research capacity, you need not be relentless in asking "What do you mean?" but you must be alert to taking on the mindset of a learner, not an expert.

Pat reflected upon her role as interviewer and learner:

I found that I enjoyed the interviewing process, but I had to be careful not to make it into a performance where I was the "star interviewer." Instead, I had to be aware that I was just the "seeker of knowledge." This became an important distinction for me when I first started because I had been concerned with how I would do as the interviewer—I had to shift my attention from me to the topic at hand and when I did this successfully, I found the interview to be enjoyable and meaningful.

Casting yourself as learner correspondingly casts the respondent as teacher. For many, this is a flattering role that enhances the respondent's satisfaction with being interviewed. And when you are a learner, you get taught.

ANALYTIC

Analysis does not refer to a stage in the research process. Rather, it is a continuing process that should begin as soon as your research begins. It follows, then, that interviewing is not simply devoted to data recording. It is also a time to consider relationships, salience, meanings, and explanations—analytic acts that not only lead to new questions, but also prepare you for the more concentrated period of analysis that follows the completion of data collection.

Gloria interviewed women who had left and then returned to the university. All had children. One woman told her that being away from home so much required that her husband change his participation in family life. Hearing this should have set bells ringing in Gloria's mind, but bells did not ring. She was not listening analytically at the time. The respondent's husband had to redefine his roles as spouse and father. Gloria needed to focus on the husband's behavior: include questions about it, probe it, and consider its meaning for other respondents. By not listening analytically, she could not make further use of what she was hearing.

As much as you might try to give your interviews the character of a good conversation, remember that research talk generally differs from other talk because it is driven by research purposes. When your data collection is complete and you enter a period of extended data analysis, you will find the analysis easier if all along you have been listening analytically and converting the results of ongoing analysis into further questions and notes that highlight thoughts and ideas.

THERAPEUTIC

You most likely have an opinion on the topic into which you are inquiring. As an ethnographic researcher, you want to learn the respondents' beliefs, experiences, and views rather than to persuade them of your perspective. This does not mean that you maintain zombie-like neutrality, nor that you never share your perspectives with participants. In some cases, knowing where the researcher stands on an issue is a precursor to access. In other situations (such as a study involving cancer survivors), you would not want to keep hidden your own cancer-related experiences and emotions. Some situations lend themselves to and, indeed, call for more self-disclosure and sharing during the interview. Whatever the situation, you work to set the tone and to build relationships so that your respondents can be as protective of spotted owls or as supportive of loggers' rights as they really are.

The specifically therapeutic aspect about the interview process is the unburdening effect of the respondents' saying safely whatever it is they feel. This effect is enhanced by the Rogerian "How did you feel about that?" "Would you tell me more about that?" The therapeutic dimension of good interviewing is part of what you can return to your respondents. It will not be uncommon for you to receive words of gratitude from respondents who are pleased with the opportunity for the profound, prolonged expression of personal views that your multisession interviews afford.

PATIENTLY PROBING

For qualitative inquiry, the interview is rightly conceived as an occasion for depth probes—for getting to the bottom of things. By so doing you do justice to the complexity of your topic. Qualitative researchers operate from the assumption that they cannot exhaust what there is to know about their topic. They may stop their investigation because they have run out of time or satisfied their particular research conceptualization. While the research remains in process, interviewing is a "what-else" and "tell-me-more" endeavor. The next question on your interview schedule should get its turn only when you have stopped learning from the previous one and its spinoffs. This is where patience comes in.

You need to concentrate on being patient in order to give due, unrushed attention and deliberation to the responses you elicit from each question you ask. Rush and the world rushes with you: If you communicate your satisfaction with your respondents' short-shrift replies, then you teach them how minimal your expectations are. Say, "Tell me more," and your interviewees will learn how to respond accordingly. You will find that the better you probe, the longer your interview time becomes. Short and few interview sessions are generally the mark of inexperienced or poor interviewers. With experience, the number of sessions increases.

Your probes are requests for more: more explanation, clarification, description, and evaluation, depending on your assessment of what best

follows what your respondent has said. Probes may take numerous forms; they range from silence, to sounds, to a single word, to complete sentences. Learn which forms work best for you. Silence is easy to use, if you can tolerate it. Too little silence, and you may fail to have made clear that you were inviting more respondent talk; too much silence, and you may make your respondent squirm. The magical right amount of silence indicates, "Go on. Take some more time to think about your reasons for getting involved in grassroots organizing. I'm not in a hurry."

Silence leaves more time for thought. Silence is better than a menu of choices, as is rephrasing the question if it elicits no answer, or saying, "We can come back to that later if nothing comes to mind." Used judiciously, silence is a useful and easy probe—as is the bunched utterance, "uh huh, uh huh," sometimes combined with a nodding head.

Longer, more directive probes take various forms. A couple of examples of the many possibilities are, "I'm not sure I got that straight. Would you please run that by me again?" and (accompanied by a summary of what you thought you heard), "Did I understand you correctly?" Both types invite a rethinking by the respondent, and with rethinking may come elaboration. The summary alternative can also be used to preface, "Is there anything more you'd like to add to this?" Probes also can be simple questions: "How did that happen?" "What made you feel that way?" And more complex conditional questions: "If you had returned to graduate school 15 years ago, how might your life look different now?"

Exhibit 4.2 is a portion of Terry's interview with David, a child in her elementary classroom. Terry was interested in learning styles and in how children described their own learning processes. She talked to her class about theories of learning before interviewing some of the children. In this example, Terry used probes to open up and more fully understand David's perspective on his learning. The left column presents a portion of the interview while the right column contains comments on the probes.

As Terry demonstrates, it is clearly not the form of your probe that is most critical. It is your intent to probe, supported by your patience to linger and inquire rather than get on with completing the interview. The more nervous you are, the less patient you will be to probe and the less you will find occasion to do so. Missed opportunities for probing, however, plague us all. You will read your interview transcripts and find many occasions to groan over opportunities forgone. You were too tired, too satiated with ideas, or just didn't grasp what was being said. Given the intent to probe, the requisite habit and skill will develop—although you will always probe less than you could (as you learn in the *ex post facto* replaying of your tape or reading of your transcript).

NONTHREATENING

Among other qualities that could be used to describe a good interviewer is the quality of being nonthreatening. Tardif comments on its corollary—the

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT	COMMENTS
<p>T: I'd like you to go back to when you were in kindergarten, a time you probably haven't thought about too much.</p>	<p>Good preliminary introduction to a question that eases the interviewee back to a past time.</p>
<p>D: Oh yeah, I can sort of remember some parts of it.</p>	
<p>T: Can you remember something that you learned back then?</p>	<p>Yes/No question, "Tell me about . . ." might have worked better.</p>
<p>D: Here's something that I can remember. I learned that when you are studying castles—I learned that they have arrow holes in the walls.</p>	<p>D gives a short answer about one item.</p>
<p>T: How did you learn that?</p>	<p>T opens up the interview with this probe.</p>
<p>D: The teacher said it. We were having a rug discussion, I think. The teacher was telling us some facts about castles. And I also remember how to divide stuff up equally. That's why I'm okay at dividing. . . . And I learned a trick in spelling "said." The teacher said, "it's sa-id instead of sed." I remember every single morning or almost every single morning we would play bingo on the rug until we could memorize our letters. I remember the first day I ever read a book. It's <i>Alligator in the Elevator</i>. It was my first book. I remember that after that I read all the books they had in the kindergarten. And then just kept on reading higher and higher levels. And by first grade I was reading adult books. I read the first book in the Tarzan series.</p>	<p>D can suddenly remember lots of things. He is not, however, really answering the "how" question except for learning specific things from his teacher.</p>
<p>T: Do you remember when you first learned to read?</p>	<p>Although a yes/no question, T is picking up on reading as an area to probe for the "how."</p>
<p>D: This is what I always do. I can remember I did this when I learned to walk. I don't really do it, I just kind of stand back and practice ways of doing it for a while. I'm usually late at doing things. For instance, I was never really a toddler. . . . The first day I took a step, I just walked around. I never fell either, unless I tripped or slipped. In reading, I kind of looked at signs and I read little things at first and then I just tried reading a book after a while and I could read it.</p>	<p>And D addresses the "how."</p>

EXHIBIT 4.2 Examples of Using Probes in an Interview.

sense of safety she felt in talking to Young, a sense that Young could convey by being outside Tardif's personal and professional world:

I found it easier to discuss my thoughts and feelings regarding some of my professional decisions with Beth [Young] than I did with many of my colleagues. There was a freedom of expression afforded me in these sessions that was not present in my everyday contacts. Beth was not a threat to me in any professional sense—she did not have a stake in any of the issues that had been discussed. (Young and Tardif 1988, 8)

Young's advantage as a nonthreatening outsider is a part of the case against doing research in your own workplace or with people with whom you already have a relationship.

A good interviewer never does anything to make respondents look or feel ignorant. Be attuned to the respondent's anxiety at the prospect of being interviewed. When trying to make interview arrangements, you will discover that respondents often try to excuse themselves on the grounds that they have not had enough schooling or they don't know enough. Even otherwise sophisticated respondents will be diffident about their performance, saying, "I don't know if that's what you're looking for or not."

Respondents may perceive your questions as testing, in the way they thought of questions as students at school. You may inadvertently present your questions and respond to answers in tones that suggest you are testing. Accordingly, you need to reassure, not only when you present yourself at the outset of interview arrangements, but also in the course of the interviews when respondents understandably want to know if they are being helpful to you. You need to reassure that it is perfectly permissible to say "I don't know," "I have no idea," or "I never even thought about that before."

AWARE OF POWER AND HIERARCHY

Particularly through the work of feminist and poststructuralists, the hierarchical nature of the interview process has been challenged. Fontana and Frey (1994) state,

... 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. (370)

Yet, how to minimize status differences is difficult when research roles are different from everyday interactions. In discussing interviews to gather information on the lives of women, Davies (1996) notes how, even though you may work to structure an interview so that "it is the woman's own logic and ideas that steer the conversation" (584), the interview is still different from a

conversation: "it is not a discussion where mutual information is shared, but one where the interviewee's experience is placed at the centre" (584).

How much you work to make relationship less hierarchical depends on your philosophical and theoretical positions and on the research purpose, topic, and desires of research participants. Since action, critical, and post-structural inquiries are more likely to involve research participants as co-researchers to some extent, the dialogical process is inherently valuable to learning about each other's perspectives, often as part of research goals. In conventional ethnographic research, some topics easily lend themselves (and call for) more dialogical sharing than others. In Busier's (1997) case studies of women in recovery from anorexia, the sharing of her own experience with anorexia allowed her access to women who would not have talked about their own experiences with someone who had not "been there." Yet, in the Christian School study, expression of our beliefs and opinions may have denied us access to the school.

Qualitative researchers are neither always emotionally removed and controlling of the research process, nor are they always openly sharing of their own opinions and seeking collaboration. All need to be mindful, however, of status differences inherent in research interactions and work to minimize them. Think about ways research participants could become more involved in and benefit more from the research. Finally, if you remain uncomfortable with the decidedly hierarchical nature of conventional inquiry, choose topics that allow or require more sharing of self, work only on projects requested by research participants, or explore further the possibilities of action, critical, and poststructural research.

CARING AND GRATEFUL

When you consider the time, effort, cooperation, and flying words that respondents give you, you need to be able to communicate at the end your appreciation. Leave time after your interviews for the expression of your gratitude and for other informal talk. In fact, during such informal time (with tape recorder off) you may occasionally learn more than when you were plugged in.

Your gratitude to interviewees for their participation in your research project is readily within your power to provide. Another type of return is not necessarily within your grasp, though it is a common by-product of the interview process. A young man told me in the course of an interview, "I tell you things I've never told myself." Given the amount of time qualitative researchers spend with their respondents, the research experience can affect respondents' thoughts and behavior. Questions raise consciousness. Respondents learn about themselves, you, and research.

Researchers speak of the exhilaration of conducting interviews as did Glen, who interviewed people involved in an alternative educational program: "Every interview provided another angle, and more capacity than the last. I began to realize that the interviewing was becoming slightly addictive, like

endorphins after a good run." And researchers tell of the rewards of meeting new people and of coming to understand some they thought they might not want to meet. Andrea commented,

One of the most enjoyable surprises was finding common ground with those respondents I was least inclined to interview. I would be struck, upon leaving, at how pleasant a time we had together. . . . I wrote in my journal: "Up close, these people don't seem as extreme to me as they appeared before I met them."

If your interview sessions are pleasant and sometimes exhilarating for you, then they most likely are for your respondents as well. Communicate your thanks.

SOME TYPICAL PROBLEMS

Fortunately, it is only once that you can do something for the first time (or do we believe that because it is consoling?). Helen reflected in somber tones about the beginning of her interviews:

Things don't always work the way you plan. It took me a month to get access. Then when I got there I learned the interview guides had not been passed out. I had asked the principal to identify teachers who knew a lot, and found he had simply told various people that they would meet with me. About a third of the way through the first interview I realized that the pause button was still on my tape recorder.

Making the best of bad times may be all that you can manage as you try to salvage something from an interview, at least chalking it up as an occasion to get to know your respondent.

Remembering to check your tape recorder comes easier after your initiation. Beyond problems most commonly associated with the novice's early days are others that can occur to anyone at any time. For example, your respondents do not answer the question you ask. What is going on? The reason may simply be that the respondent has innocently (without a hidden agenda) taken a fancy to discussing something else. If you can listen as gracefully to their off-target (in your terms) as you do to their on-target talk, then the time that you lose may be more than offset by the enhanced quality of your respondent's answers. With the serendipity that abounds in qualitative research, the perceived off-target talk may even lead you into a relevant and related territory of which you were not aware, opening up a whole new path for understanding. Or it may simply be that your question was not clear or the respondent was too nervous to concentrate. Look for other suitable words in which to recast your question. If restating does not help, go on to other questions rather than risk the respondent developing feelings of inadequacy.

The reason for not answering a particular question, or for respondents' turning the focus of talk to topics of their own, may be more complex. Jennifer had a respondent who brought the talk around to safety in the nursery school, when Jennifer had the virtues of outdoor play on her mind. In time, Jennifer realized that her respondent gave very little time in her program to outdoor play and was saving herself from embarrassment in an interview that was directed exclusively toward outdoor play. In still more time, Jennifer realized that she needed to preface her interviews with the clearest possible statement that her inquiry on outdoor play was free of advocacy, so that respondents could continue to feel good about themselves—whether they did or did not include play in their nursery school program.

Such prefacing is critical to effective interviewing because respondents logically conclude that if you ask a lot about something, you must think it is important. This may be true, but it does not necessarily make you an advocate. To the extent that you appear as an advocate, your respondents may become defensive or tell you what they think you want to hear. Try explaining to them that you believe there are both successful and unsuccessful teachers who emphasize outdoor play; that you are not making judgments about success; that you want only to understand the place of outdoor play, or lack of it, in their nursery school curriculum. If it is there, what are the reasons? If it is not, then, again, for what reasons?

When respondents show a pattern of turning away from your questions, they may be saying obliquely what they won't say directly: "I don't want to continue this interview." Other forms of resistance to being interviewed are missed appointments and monosyllabic replies. The resistance may be apparent or real. Apparent resistance may result from respondents' being preoccupied with personal matters that preclude concentrating on your matters. If they want to talk about their personal problems, your listening may clear the deck for them to return to your questions. Cutting short your current session or postponing further sessions for a few weeks may suffice to return to normalcy. Do not prematurely conclude that respondent resistance is tantamount to their wish to terminate all further interviews. It may be that your questions are treading on matters too sensitive for them to discuss with you. Be gently direct. If you observe resistance, ask about it: "It seems to me that you have not been comfortable. . . . Are there areas you'd rather not talk about?" You might even ask, "Do you think we ought to stop the interviews?" If you do not hear yes, then you can continue interviewing and judge the quality of what you're hearing. If it is poor, shorten your list of questions and end the sessions as soon as you can manage to do so.

Far removed from the problem of resistance is the problem of the nonstop talker. Respondent fluency is wonderful if it is on your topic, but if not, then you need to learn to redirect the flow of talk. Making a wordless sound or a physical sign, such as a slightly upraised hand, may stop the stream of words so you can apologize for your interruption and pick up on something the respondent has said that you can probe. Or summarize what the respondent has said and then bridge to where next you wish to go. The idea is to avoid making an abrupt shift to a topic distant from where the respondent's talk had been.

In interviews, as in ordinary conversations, people make contradictory statements. Consider the possibilities that contradictions connote: the evolution of the respondent's thinking about the topic; the respondent's confusion about the topic; the respondent's being comfortably of two minds about the topic. Is the topic generating the contradictions worthy of clarification? If so, then you need to probe further into the respondent's most recent statement, right then and there. In addition, you can raise the topic again at your next session, inviting more thought on it. You could also take the two seemingly contradictory positions and put them into a question like the following: "I've heard some people say . . . I've heard other people say . . . What's your thinking about these two positions?" When the respondent has replied, you can continue: "Is it possible that both are right?" The point is, when you ask questions, especially about complex matters, you cannot reasonably expect complete, carefully considered responses to be ready at hand. If you allow respondents time to think, then you will get more reflective replies. It may also be that, when explained, the responses that at first appeared contradictory to you, are not at all.

Though not a problem in the same sense as those just stated, you may find it problematic to decide whether or not the interviews—a particular session or the entire series with one person—went well. In one sense, "going well" means getting answers that fit the questions you ask and that you can visualize as part of your forthcoming text; careful listening will indicate whether this criterion is met. In another, more serious sense, going well means creating connection and trust so that the talk delves below the surface of things. Trustworthiness of both researcher and respondent is likely to increase with time. Clearly, the more one deems a person trustworthy, the more he or she will speak fully and frankly to that person. Thus, judging how the interviews are going may be tentative at first—you feel good about the interview because the flow of talk was easy, smooth, uninhibited, and on target—and confirmed or challenged later as your relationships develop (or don't) and as you acquire data from other sources.

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

Facilitating a discussion on a particular topic among a selected set of people, or *focus group* interviewing, has gained popularity in recent years. Gathering a group together to answer questions on a topic is not, however, a new data-gathering technique. During World War II, for example, focus group research was used to develop effective training material for the troops (Morgan 1997). After the war, focus groups were primarily used for market research until the 1980s, when health researchers, in particular, began using group interviews to develop better means of education related to health issues like contraception and AIDS prevention. Increasingly, other disciplines have embraced focus group research. Group interviews are particularly useful in action and evaluation research where participants can express multiple perspectives on a similar experience such as the implementation of a particular policy or curriculum. A focus group can also be valuable in a

pilot study. If participants are selected from the research site and know that part of their purpose is to assist in creating the research design, they can help you learn about aspects of the research site—language, norms, customs—in addition to helping you figure out overall research questions, participant selection and data collection strategies, and, perhaps, ways in which the research can better involve and contribute to the community or group being researched.

I tend to use *focus group* interchangeably with *group interview*, although some distinguish differences. For example, Bloor and Wood (2006, 99) state, “group interviews tend to proceed as a question-and-answer session with the researcher posing the questions, whereas focus groups will be characterized by more debate among the participants themselves perhaps facilitated by focusing exercises.” Using these definitions, a researcher might set up a group interview to save time and travel by being able to interview more than one person over the same time period. Each participant would be expected to answer the same question in turn. In contrast, the researcher would use a focus group to better understand how a group would discuss some issue and elicit multiple perspectives in the process. My perspective is that group interviews, defined in this way, are not an ideal way to do interviews and do not allow for confidentiality and ease in the conversational and probing aspects possible in one on one interviews. Although group interviews, in this light, might be the only means for data collection in some situations, they set the scene for neither the depth nor intensity that can be reached through both one on one and focus group interviews.

Morgan’s 1997 text *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research* provides a comprehensive discussion of focus group research. He suggests that “the simplest test of whether focus groups are appropriate for a research project is to ask how actively and easily the participants would discuss the topic of interest” (17). Planning focus group research requires some different design decisions than that needed for one-on-one interviews: Where can you meet as a group? Who should you invite to participate in each group? How many people should be in each group? How many groups should you include? Morgan gives sound advice on each of these issues as summarized in Exhibit 4.3 on designing focus group interviews. If you are planning to include focus groups in your research, read his book.

Focus group interviewing relies heavily on facilitation or moderator skills. As in one-on-one interviews, the researcher designs questions aimed at getting words to fly. Unlike one-on-one interviews, however, discussion does not rely on turn-taking between interviewer and participants. Instead, it depends on interaction within the group, stimulated by the researcher’s question(s). The researcher becomes the moderator or discussion facilitator who helps the group set up ground rules at the beginning (only one person talking at a time, allowing others to have their say, etc.) and then may only have to pose or redirect a question from time to time, keeping track of the clock so that the various items are addressed. As in individual interviews, the focus group facilitator often begins the session with an experiential question that each participant answers in turn; and thus the facilitator works to get not only base-line experiential data, but also everyone comfortable in talking. Sometimes, at the end, each person is again asked to speak,

Where?	Focus group interviews often take place in some sort of community office space, a university seminar room, or, occasionally, in someone's living room. In the "two-thirds" world, focus groups generally take place in a public space, frequently outdoors.
Who?	Depending upon the topic, homogeneous groups in terms of gender, age, race, or sexual orientation, etc., can allow for a more free-flowing, relaxed conversation as well as facilitate the development of analytical concepts based upon data gathered in different kinds of groups. As Morgan (1997) warns, you want homogeneity in potentially influential background variables, but not in attitudes toward the topic. Focus groups are generally made up of strangers, but in some cases, such as in most action and evaluation research projects, participants may be coworkers, classmates, or otherwise known to each other.
How many in a group?	Small groups of six to ten participants generally work best. If the groups are larger, they tend to break into subgroup discussions that are difficult to facilitate and record.
How many groups?	Projects generally plan for three to five focus groups, but as Morgan (1997, 44) states, "The safest advice is to determine a target number of groups in the planning stage but to have a flexible alternative available if more groups are needed."
How long should a focus group last?	Generally, focus group gatherings are scheduled for one to two hours. Morgan (1997, 47) suggests setting the length at ninety minutes, but telling the participants to plan on two hours. This allows for longer discussions if the conversation is intense and also helps control for either a late start or early leavers.
How many questions are needed?	Four or five good questions should suffice for a somewhat structured focus group session. In a more unstructured session, you may need to pose only one or two broadly stated topics or questions.

EXHIBIT 4.3 Designing Focus Group Interviews.

summarizing his or her position on the topic. Morgan (1997) provides a good list of techniques for moderating groups with varying levels of facilitator involvement. He notes that if your focus group is comprised of teachers or organizational personnel who are used to managing groups, with a little instruction, they will run the groups for you.

Recording focus group discussions can be challenging. Except in sessions where participants run discussions themselves, trying to both moderate and note

discussion is difficult. Tape recording the discussion is generally necessary (perhaps with two tape recorders in different locations to pick up soft voices as well as to have one recorder act as a backup). Sometimes the researcher brings along someone to assist with notation, jotting down who is speaking along with several spoken words so that this information can be entered into the transcription.

Internet technology has simplified recording issues for some focus group researchers who conduct "real time" focus groups online. In discussion groups or chat groups, all participants are online at the same time. The researcher poses a question and participants type responses that are transmitted to the whole group. People can reply to any one message at any time. Advantages include having a recorded script of the discussion with each respondent identified and the ability to have a virtual meeting space in which geographically separated people can participate. These virtual gatherings also tend to be less expensive and easier to schedule than face-to-face focus groups. Disadvantages include the inability to easily facilitate the discussion because it tends to move so rapidly with people responding simultaneously to different messages. Sometimes the person who types the fastest dominates the discussion or determines the direction it takes (Mann and Stewart 2000).

Virtual reality sites are another possibility for online focus groups and address some of the disadvantages of chat groups. Each participant logs on to a virtual world, chooses an avatar, sometimes uploading a photo of themselves for their head. A room with a large seminar table and chairs (or campfire with logs for sitting) could be the setting. As each participant joins the virtual world, their avatar appears and the real-time interaction complete with actions and talk can begin.

Non-real-time focus groups can also be conducted. This process is more like email in that questions go out to all participants and each can respond to the group when convenient. Advantages include the ability to include people from diverse time zones, to generate long, reflective comments, and to involve a large number of people (Mann and Stewart 2000). A disadvantage is that you tend to lose the group interactive nature, the strength of most focus group research. Setting up a blog can also serve as a kind of non-real-time focus group that "allows researchers to establish virtual communities with those sharing their specialization . . ." (Runte 2008, 314). Alternatively, pre-established blogs can also be a source of varying perspectives on a topic. For example, a nurse pursuing a doctorate with a specialization in Elder Care found a wealth of material at the New York Times blog site for "The New Old Age" (<http://newoldage.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/>). Semiprivate blogs can be used to publish early drafts of material and to get feedback from a select group of readers—a semiprivate blog could be used also as a kind of member check as you analyze and begin writing.

In summary, focus group interviewing can be an efficient use of time in that it allows access to the perspectives of a number of people during the same time period. In addition to learning about the research topic itself, focus group interviews can be useful as exploratory research to help determine the line of questioning you want to pursue in individual interviews or to figure out what sites

might be most productive for participant observation. And, it can be a useful way to gather further insight into issues that developed through analysis of individual interviews or to member check your developing understandings with your participants. Focus group research can also have emancipatory qualities if the topic is such that the discussion gives voice to silenced experiences or augments personal reflection, growth, and knowledge development.

Focus group research is not without drawbacks. In particular, ethical problems related to confidentiality can arise and the researcher may decide accordingly to not bring up certain topics. With focus groups, the researcher should expect to not get as in-depth information from any one person as with individual interviews, although this may not be the case if multiple sessions are held with the same group. And, although the discussion may generate new ideas as people explore their experiences and perspectives, it may also silence some people whose ideas are quite different from the majority of those speaking. Contrarily, some might pose a more extreme perspective than they would ordinarily simply to counterbalance an opposing viewpoint. Finally, setting up the focus group event takes work and moderating the discussion can be exhausting as one tries to balance allowing the discussion to flow versus guiding its direction.

CONSIDERATIONS

The type of interviewing emphasized in this chapter is *semistructured*—you have specified questions you know you want to ask; *open*—you are prepared to develop new questions to follow unexpected leads that arise in the course of your interviewing; and *depth-probing*—you pursue all points of interest with variant expressions that mean “tell me more” and “explain.” The intent of such interviewing is to capture the unseen that was, is, will be, or should be; how respondents think or feel about something; and how they explain or account for something. Such a broad-scale approach is directed to understanding phenomena in their fullest possible complexity. The elaborated responses you hear provide the affective and cognitive underpinnings of your respondents’ perceptions.

Interviewing is an occasion for close researcher-participant interaction. Qualitative research provides many opportunities to engage feelings because it is a distance-reducing experience. The feelings in question are those that are involved in researchers’ relationships with others—the matter of rapport—and those that are involved in researchers’ reactions to and reflections on what they are learning—the matters of subjectivity and reflexivity (the issues in Chapter 5). Before turning to the next chapter, however, I conclude with a few considerations regarding the interviewing process.

A group of students, several other faculty members, and I had just entered a Warli village in India, where we were going to stay for several days. The Warli people, like other indigenous groups in India, have been struggling for land rights in the forested hill areas where they have traditionally lived. Our group of thirty-four dropped sleeping bags and packs in the community building, a large wattle

and daub structure with an earth floor covered by a veneer of cow dung that binds the dirt and keeps down the dust. After being fed a meal of rice, dhal, and greens, our translator-guides said that the village women would meet with the female students inside the room where we had put our belongings and that the village men would meet with the male students outside under a tree.

As part of an international education program focusing on culture, ecology, and justice, we were living and studying in five different countries over an eight-month period. In addition to other assignments, each student was responsible for doing comparative research on a topic of his or her choice such as women's roles in agriculture or forces for and impacts of migration. Students, therefore, were not at a loss for questions when the opportunity presented itself. Although not always adept in forming good questions that elicited on-target answers, students were beginning to feel uneasy about a larger issue. In our thirst to have questions answered, were we missing out on authentic exchanges, if that were possible in the short time periods (one night to one week) we stayed in most villages? How were our questions limiting what we were learning and how were the questions setting the stage for a specific type of interaction, more or less controlled by ourselves, the outsiders? What would happen if we had no questions, no agenda?

We proceeded with our questions. After a while, the students gave the floor to Jo, whose research project focused on reproductive health. She asked, "What kinds of problems do women have during childbearing?" Our interpreter, who had worked as an advocate and activist among the villagers, suggested that she change the question so it asked each woman to state how many children she had born and, of those, how many were living. One by one the women answered, "I have born seven children, three are living." "Five, two are alive." "Nine, four are still with me." These simple answers by each woman, often holding a child in her lap in our circle on the dirt floor, were stunning in revealing the complexity of the women's physical and emotional lives, and, in contrasting their lives to our own. Previously formulated questions disappeared as students urgently wanted to know more of these women's lives—why had their children died? What happens when a child dies? What role do their husbands play in child rearing? What are all the daily tasks required of the woman? Now that so many men have to migrate to other areas to make some money, how has that affected the women's lives? The women smiled over our questions, and always politely answered. When one laughed as she said, "Well, I'm glad the men are gone often—they aren't here to beat us as much," we were again bewildered, not only by her statement but that she had laughed as she said it. We didn't know how to begin to interpret. We had little context for understanding.

Equally, they wanted to know about us and seemed amazed with our answers when they turned our question around and asked us, at least twenty women of childbearing age, how many children we have had and how many had died. None of us had children. They then wanted to know how many of us were married since we were all beyond the age at which they marry (generally by age 13). None of us were married. They wanted to know what kinds of crops we raised. None of us were from farm families, although some of us liked to garden

and grew a few summer vegetables when we were in one place long enough. They asked questions of us that we hadn't considered asking of them—what songs did we sing in the evenings, what dances did we dance together? The only dance we could come up with that we all knew was the hokey-pokey. As the exchange continued, we, the outsiders, despite our vast economic privileges, began to feel somewhat bankrupt in terms of cultural practices and community connections. I do not know what the Warli women thought of us overall, but some expressed sincere sympathy for me, a woman with graying hair, who had neither husband nor children.

That researchers would even consider asking strangers questions about their lives is a practice developed over the last century, a practice reflecting, in part, the democratization of knowledge or the belief that everyone has a perspective to contribute. According to Gubrium and Holstein (2002), the growth and acceptance of interview research is part of modernization. Those of us from Westernized countries are used to surveys and interviews as a way of gathering information. We fill them out or take the time to answer questions without giving it much thought. Interviewing is not only an accepted research method in Western cultures, but also a main source of entertainment whether listening to Terry Gross on public radio or watching Oprah Winfrey on television.

In order for this democratization of knowledge (as well as commodification of *self*) to occur, another change took place first: the individualization of the *self*. "The notion of the bounded, unique self, more or less integrated as the center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action, is a very recent version of the subject" (Gubrium and Holstein 2002, 6). In many other societies, a collective self made up of family or community or tribe is the seat of authority, not the individual. The collective self is a concept that's difficult to grasp for many raised in individual-focused societies.

The interview process, despite being the mainstay data gathering technique in qualitative research and despite its role in documenting the voices of many perspectives, can also be seen as having its roots in a kind of colonizing approach to research. Typically, the researcher is "in control," developing the questions and thereby determining the direction of the interaction. Typically, the interviewer tries to remain open and to not influence what the respondent will say through body language or verbally. The respondent is thereby treated somewhat passively, as a receptacle of knowledge, which the researcher is "mining." And, the researcher, although managing the interaction, is somewhat passive as well in that, other than the questions, he or she contributes as little as possible to what is being said.

As poststructuralist scholars challenge conventional research practices, the interview process, itself, is under scrutiny. How can we co-construct interviews? How do we learn from each other and create a dynamic in which no one person is pitching the questions while the other is sending words flying? In other words, how do we co-construct knowledge? Whose story are we telling when we do interview research and for what purposes? Do different situations call for different kinds of interview practices? When? How do we decide?

Bringing these "considerations" up here, at the end of the chapter, is not meant to imply that you should disregard previous sections with its advice

steeped in the interpretive paradigm of research. All disciplines go through “moments” (Lincoln and Denzin 2000) (and sometimes fads), in which scholars embrace new ideas, reassemble them, incorporate some aspects, discard others. Qualitative research is not a static procedure, and those of us who practice it hope it never becomes so. Current challenges make the process more personally interesting and morally vital as we struggle to determine the kind of researchers we each want to be and how our choices reflect, challenge, and contribute to differing perspectives.

Through these considerations, I also want to remind you that what we come to know, whether “gathered” or “co-constructed,” is always partial, always fragmented. I mentioned that while we were inside the community center with the Warli women, the male students and faculty were outside with the Warli men. While our group of women grew increasingly depressed with what we were learning, the male students were feeling elated. They and the Warli men had discussed intensely the struggles for community and for communal autonomy. They had shared philosophical perspectives and found common ground in their needs for connection, friendship, and brotherhood. In the same village, on the same evening, we regrouped from our conversations with two very different understandings of Warli life.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

- Gubrium, J., and J. A. Holstein. 2009. *Analyzing Narrative Reality*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Gubrium, J. F., and J. A. Holstein (eds). 2002. *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Holstein J., and J. Gubrium (eds.). 2003. *Inside Interviewing: New Lenses, New Concerns*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Morgan, D. 1997. *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Patton, M. 2002. *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

EXERCISES

Class Exercises

1. The following activity is adapted from Berg (1995, 63). Turn to a classmate and decide who will be the speaker and who, the listener. The instructor assigns a topic that students know about, but are not particularly invested in, such as their opinions on the tenure and promotion process for university professors. The speaker talks for 30 seconds on the topic and then the listener repeats what he or she has heard, using the speaker’s words (“I” statements). Then students change roles and repeat the exercise. The instructor then assigns a more personal topic such as “first conscious awareness of racism” and increases time allotment to a minute. Students follow the same procedure as above. At the end of the exercise, discuss nonverbal aspects of the two scenarios: What were differences in body language? In the level of sound? In the tone of what was being said? Which kind of topic would make for a better interview? What kinds of things should the interviewer observe, in addition to listening to the words being spoken?

2. Return to your class's practice research statement developed at the end of Chapter 2. As a class, create five interview questions that would help one understand the chosen topic. Pilot the questions by interviewing each other. Each student should have time to be both interviewer and interviewee. As interviewers, students take full, running notes of the interview. As interviewees, students reflect on the questions and make suggestions to reword, extend, or delete. After the interviews, reflect as a group both on the questions and the interviewing process. As homework, type up your interview transcript, filling in details where remembered. Hold on to these transcripts for a later exercise.

Individual Exercises

1. This exercise is adapted from one of Roorbach's (1998) writing exercises. With your topic firmly in mind, imagine that you are the interviewee and that you are sitting across from Barbara Walters (or Terry Gross). Without any notes in front of you, turn on a tape recorder and enact the interview, playing both the interviewer and interviewee. What kinds of questions does Barbara ask? What are the tough questions? Where will the heartwarming moments be? Where are the shockers? What will everyone be talking about tomorrow? Continue through the interview until it comes to a satisfactory close. Play the interview back and transcribe all the questions. Seriously consider how each might work for your research project.
2. After your interview with yourself, create five to ten open-ended interview questions for your research project. Pilot the questions with a classmate, asking your partner to pretend that she or he is one of your participants. Work together to reshape the questions. Then pilot the questions with someone who has had experiences similar to your research population or ask the questions of a research participant who is willing to collaborate with you on developing your questions. Reshape the questions again after reflecting upon what worked, what did not, and what new questions arose.