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4

QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWING

◆ Carol A. B. Warren

Qualitative interviewing is based in conversation (Kvale 1996), with the emphasis on researchers asking questions and listening, and respondents answering (Rubin and Rubin 1995). It is similar to standardized survey interviewing in this respect, but unlike the survey interview, the epistemology of the qualitative interview tends to be more constructionist than positivist. Interview participants are more likely to be viewed as meaning makers, not passive conduits for retrieving information from an existing vessel of answers (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). The purpose of most qualitative interviewing is to derive interpretations, not facts or laws, from respondent talk. Some researchers frame the qualitative interview as a "speech event" (see Mishler 1986), which is useful, for instance, in narrative or conversation analysis (see in this volume Baker, Chapter 37; Riessman, Chapter 33). Other researchers, such as myself, frame it

more substantively and interactionally, aiming to understand the meaning of respondents' experiences and life worlds.[1]

The emphasis of this chapter is on the substantive and social contours of the qualitative interview. Following a brief note on the importance of participants' perspectives for an understanding of the process and the relevancies of qualitative interviewing, the chapter proceeds through three major sections. The first of these takes up some initial considerations the researcher might engage in preparing to do qualitative interviewing; the focus is on concerns that are preliminary to the actual interviewing process. The second section deals with the interview process itself, especially as it relates to meaning making. The third and final section takes up the matter of interpretation in relation to self and others. Throughout the chapter, I draw on various qualitative interview-based studies for illustration, especially my own.

◆ A Note on Perspective

Donna Luff (1999:701) refers to perspectives as "fractured subjectivities." Applied to interviewing, Luff's characterization suggests that participants—both researchers and respondents—speak to each other not from stable and coherent standpoints, but from varied *perspectives*. These include the structured and historically grounded roles and hierarchies of their society, particularly those of gender, race, and class (Campbell 1998). Extending this to more local considerations, it also suggests that the perspectives relevant to the qualitative interview encompass the social positions that emerge in the interview itself, apparent in talk and interaction between interviewer and respondent. For example, during an interview, the perspective of the respondent may shift from one standpoint in her experience to another, as she speaks, say, as a former child, then as a mother, as a caregiver, then as an employee, or even as one who watches the local news (Holstein and Gubrium 1995; see also Gubrium and Holstein, Chapter 1, this volume). Although situational, these perspectives shape the flow of the interview and, in its qualitative version, are taken into account by the interviewer in understanding the meaning-making process.

In most texts on qualitative interviewing, the perspective of the interviewer is taken to be that of the discipline: she or he is interviewing in order to write, publish, and contribute to a body of knowledge and literature. The ways in which this disciplinary task are conceived is historically grounded, with the planning, conduct, and interpretation of interviews shaped by changing rules and expectations. What was viewed as improper procedure at an earlier time might now be de rigueur, as changing concepts of the interview task become accepted (see in this volume Platt, Chapter 2, as well as all contributions to Part VI). Indeed, even the significance of perspectives is historically grounded, with the current recognition that perspectives other than those drawn from the discipline come into play for the interviewer as well as the respondent, especially in qualitative interviewing.[2]

Much has been written on the respondent's perspectives in the qualitative interview, especially in relation to gender (Arendell 1997; Warren and Hackney 2000). The chapters in Part II of this volume are, in some sense, an outline of an accumulated discourse on types of respondents, including the respondent as ethnic, gendered, aged, classed, and identified with one or another sexual community. An important point to emphasize here is that these are not only distinctive respondents but various perspectives that can be taken up by a single respondent within a single interview. Perspective is especially significant in qualitative interviewing, where meaning making is center stage in the interpretive process.

My own disciplinary and research experience, for example, forms a perspective, one that gives shape to how I present the qualitative interview.[3] I write this chapter from the perspective of a seasoned sociologist who has done qualitative interviewing and extensive writing about interviews. During the 1980s, I interviewed respondents for two projects, one on older women married to younger men (Warren 1996) and the other on patients, relatives, psychiatrists, and hospital administrators involved with electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), formerly known as electroshock therapy or EST (Warren and Levy 1991; Kneeland and Warren forthcoming). My ethnographic study of a gay community in the late 1960s also included interviewing (Warren 1972). In another study, I analyzed 30,000 pages of interviews with 17 women diagnosed as schizophrenic in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and their husbands. This was known as the Bay Area study (Sampson, Messinger, and Towne 1964), material from which I used to write a monograph titled *Madwives* on the intersection of psychiatry, gender, and marital roles during that era (Warren 1987). I drew on the interpretive, feminist perspectives of the 1980s for my reinterpretation of this material. I have also written or coauthored a number of methodological articles on interviewing based on *Madwives* and other research (Warren 1985; Harkess and Warren 1993; Karner and Warren 1995) and, like many of my colleagues, have supervised several generations of student research using qualitative interviewing and ethnography.[4] All of this shapes this presentation, which, together with other perspectives, both within and outside the qualitative interview, will bring up noteworthy points throughout the chapter.

◆ Preliminary Considerations

Qualitative interviewing is a kind of guided conversation (Kvale 1996; Rubin and Rubin 1995) in which the researcher carefully listens "so as to *hear the meaning*" of what is being conveyed (Rubin and Rubin 1995:7). James Spradley (1979:8) extends the concept of listening to include distinctly disciplinary concerns. According to Spradley, the purpose of interviewing is to make "cultural inferences," thick descriptions of a given social world analyzed for cultural patterns and themes. These are of typical anthropological interest, which is Spradley's own disciplinary context. Spradley explains that qualitative researchers make cultural inferences from three sources: what people say, the ways they act, and the artifacts they use. Taken together, these sources implicate qualitative interviewing's sister research genre, ethnography (see Atkinson and Coffey, Chapter 38, this volume.)

QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWING AND ETHNOGRAPHY

Qualitative interviewing has long been linked to ethnographic fieldwork, a traditional staple of anthropological research. Today, it is linked to many other disciplinary contexts. Qualitative interviewing and fieldwork are often classified together, along with documentary analysis, as qualitative or interpretive methods (Kvale 1996:9; Rubin and Rubin 1995:34-35). Yet the "cultural inferences" that the qualitative methods of ethnography and interviewing provide give us subtly different lenses on the world. Ethnography's lens is that of lived experience, set in an eternal present. The lens of the intensive interview is verbal—what people say and mean—but its temporal range is biographical, extending into the past and the future. In this regard, contrast Erving Goffman's (1961) ethnography of a late-1950s mental hospital with my own interview-based study of mental patients (Warren 1987). From Goffman, we see staff-patient and patient-patient interaction in the context of that decade's eternal present. From my work, we see the meaning of mental-patienthood in the context of 1950s housewifery.

Researchers often choose qualitative interviews over ethnographic methods when their topics of interest do not center on particular settings but their concern is with establishing common patterns or themes between particular types of respondents. As Rubin and Rubin (1995) note, interview topics come from many sources: "employers; life experiences . . . the researcher's personality; from ethnic, racial, or sexual identity. Some subjects attract researchers' curiosity; others appeal to researchers' political or social values" (p. 49).

Where both settings and individuals are available, and are mutually pertinent, researchers often combine ethnographic data with interview data, illuminating both the culture and the biographical particulars of members' worlds. Social researchers use ethnographic interviews and other field-based methods to "fill in" the biographical meanings of observed interactions (Spradley and Mann 1975; Esterberg 1997).[5] These methods hearken back, in sociology, to the Chicago school and its methods,

which combined surveys, case studies, documentary analysis, and qualitative interviewing. These methods were brought together in the service of understanding the varieties of experience that made up the Chicago urban experience in the 1930s and 1940s. Although Chicago school scholars were short on methodological treatises and ruminations (in general they just did their job, but see Palmer 1928), certain aspects of contemporary qualitative interviewing, and its penchant for ethnographic linkages, can be seen as linear inheritors of the Chicago school.

DESIGNING QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW RESEARCH

Steiner Kvale (1996) writes that the original Greek meaning of the word *method* is "a route that leads to the goal" (p. 4). Extending this concept by way of a traveler's metaphor to the qualitative interview researcher, Kvale adds, "The interviewer wanders along with the local inhabitants, asks questions that lead the subjects to tell their own stories of the lived world, and converses with them in the original Latin meaning of *conversation* as 'wandering together with' " (p. 4). The design of qualitative interview research, for Kvale, is open-ended in the sense that it is more concerned with being attuned to who is being traveled with, so to speak, than with setting out a precise route for all to follow, as in survey research.

As with ethnography in earlier decades, the wanderings of qualitative interviewing became systematized into texts and monographs during the 1990s (Arksey and Knight 1999; Holstein and Gubrium 1995; Kvale 1996; Rubin and Rubin 1995; Weiss 1994). Kvale (1996:88) proposes that, like Shakespeare's "man," interviewing has seven stages: thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying, and reporting. By *thematizing,* he means thinking about the topic of interest to *the researcher* and its fit with the interview

method; qualitative interviewing is designed with the aim of thematizing *the respondent's* experience as well.

Of course, designing the research may involve reviewing the existing qualitative (and perhaps quantitative) literature on the topic to determine whether a new qualitative interview study would add anything to it. The researcher also considers the time available to complete the study, access to respondents, and the financial and emotional costs of conducting the study (Rubin and Rubin 1995:54). Emotional costs are particularly relevant in qualitative interviewing because of its open-ended, exploratory character; probing for details and depths of experiences (see Johnson, Chapter 5, this volume) can be stressful for all participants.

At the same time, beyond the standard issues such as reviews of the existing literature and the practical matters of time and access, qualitative researchers' concern with meaning making causes them to be rather skeptical of standard design strictures. For example, the constructionist epistemological leanings undergirding much of qualitative research beg the researcher to move ahead and interview open-endedly. The goal is to unveil the distinctive meaning-making actions of interview participants. As such, the design of qualitative interview research necessarily places limits on standardization and the working relevance of existing literature.

This is not to say that the research literature is unimportant. It is, but its relevance for the design of interviewing is confined to the first steps, if it is taken into account at all. From the "research questions" generated by a possible review of the literature, the interviewer develops 10 to 12 specific questions, together with a face sheet covering such descriptors as respondent age, race, and gender. Rubin and Rubin (1995: 145-46) note that the qualitative interview uses three kinds of questions: main questions that begin and guide the conversation, probes to clarify answers or request further examples, and follow-up questions that

pursue the implications of answers to main questions. But, equally important, the qualitative interviewer remains flexible and attentive to the variety of meanings that may emerge as the interview progresses. This open stance includes being alert to developing meanings that may render previously designed questions *irrelevant* in light of the changing contexts of meaning.[6]

FINDING RESPONDENTS

Whom does one interview? In the logic of survey research, interviews are conducted with a representative sample of a larger population, drawn systematically in order that the findings will be generalizable to that population. In qualitative interview studies, respondents may be chosen based on a priori research design, theoretical sampling, or "snowball" or convenience design, or particular respondents may be sought out to act as key informants (Holstein and Gubrium 1995; Spradley 1979). In the Bay Area study, respondents were selected by a priori research design. Interviewers were to approach Caucasian, married women with children who were first admissions to Napa State Hospital within one week of their admission (Sampson et al. 1964; Warren 1987). Such a priori strictures, of course, do not always work out. One respondent was found to have had prior psychiatric admissions, but she was kept in the sample because, by the time this discovery was made, a great deal of time and effort had been expended in interviewing her.

Using a theoretical sampling strategy, the interviewer seeks out respondents who seem likely to epitomize the analytic criteria in which he or she is interested (see Glaser and Strauss 1967; see also Charmaz, Chapter 32, this volume). Because the object of qualitative interviewing is to discern meaningful patterns within thick description, researchers may try to minimize or maximize differences among respondents —say, according to race or class—in order

to highlight or contrast patterns. In general, with one-time interviews, the more comparisons to be made between sets of patterns, the more respondents are likely to be interviewed. For example, a researcher studying male caregivers of elderly Alzheimer's patients may decide on 20 or 25 interviews, whereas a researcher comparing male and female caregivers may seek 35 or 40.[7]

Theoretical sampling may be carried out through a "snowball" process: One respondent is located who fulfills the theoretical criteria, then that person helps to locate others through her or his social networks (Arksey and Knight 1999:4; Biernacki and Waldorf 1981; Weiss 1994:25). But there are many other ingenious ways in which qualitative researchers find respondents to interview. For example, one sociology graduate student at the University of Southern California who was interested in the topic of interracial marriage approached her respondents during her working hours as a supermarket checker. Any time she checked the groceries of an apparently interracial couple, she asked them if they would be willing to be interviewed. Most of them agreed, to my supervisory surprise.

One of the problems in seeking respondents for an interview study may be, in Hillary Arksey and Peter Knight's (1999:70) terms, not being able to find anyone to talk to. This can be a problem, especially when the topic of the interview is stigmatizing or when the occurrence of needed respondents is rare in a population. Both were true for our study of elderly ECT patients (Warren and Levy 1991). For other topics, such as that of Laurel Richardson's *The New Other Woman* (1985), finding respondents is less difficult, even if personally stigmatizing. As Richardson says:

> Finding "other women" to interview was not difficult. . . . I announced my research interest to nearly everyone I met—conferees, salesclerks, travel acquaintances, and so on. Women I met in these different circumstances volun-

teered to be interviewed, or put me in contact with women who were involved with married men. (P. x)

In ethnographic interviews, informants may be chosen for their communicative competence or access to information rather than their personal epitomization of some topic-related characteristic of interest to the researcher (Briggs 1986). As Spradley (1979) notes: "I use the term *informant* in a very specific way, not to be confused with concepts like subject, respondent, friend, or actor. . . . Informants are first and foremost *native speakers*" (p. 8), one connotation of which is that they have inside knowledge of some social world. Where interviewer and interviewee share the same life world, however, the selection of an informant may be based more on the particular standpoint *from* which the individual can interpret cultural meanings. As James Holstein and Jaber Gubrium (1995) state, "The term *informant* no longer conveys a distinct difference in narrative competence; instead it signals more a difference in point of view" (p. 24). Indeed, because of their interest in the construction, not just the substance, of meaning making, Holstein and Gubrium propose that, where there is a choice, qualitative interviewers should select "respondents because they are assumed to be capable of narrative production" (p. 24), thus dignifying them as people and orienting to the interview project as narrative collaboration.

Both positivist and constructionist discussions of respondent selection tend to assume that the interviewer and respondent will be strangers; indeed, the title of a recent text on qualitative interviewing is *Learning from Strangers* (Weiss 1994). However, this may not be the case. Richardson (1985), for example, included fellow conferees and acquaintances among her 55 respondents. In ethnographic studies, where the researcher is a member of the community she or he is studying, respondents may even be a part of the interviewer's own social circle. Kristin Esterberg

(1997) describes her theoretical sampling of members of a community with which she was quite familiar:

The initial interviewees were selected, in part, for their location in the community; I actively sought out those who were seen by others at the "center" and at the "margins" of community. I also sought out women, with varying degrees of success, in "under-represented" categories: old women, bisexual women, working-class women, and women of color. (Pp. 177-78)

In some cases, sampling begins with acquaintances and moves on to strangers. This is typical of snowball sampling. In the ECT study (Warren and Levy 1991), we initially posted flyers in nursing homes seeking respondents, with absolutely no luck. In discussing the study with colleagues and friends, however, we found that many had elderly relatives who had had ECT. Similarly, in our study of older women married to younger men, respondents included university colleagues, friends, and even a cleaning woman who worked for one of the researchers.

INFORMED CONSENT

As with other kinds of research involving human subjects, qualitative interviewing requires researchers to deal with professional ethical codes, in particular federal and university human subjects regulations. These have become more formalized over the past several decades, to the point where some say that they unduly constrain the conduct of social research or protect the researcher more than the subjects of the research (see Adler and Adler, Chapter 25, this volume). Institutional review boards (IRBs) translate federal policy into local standards for the protection of human subjects from physical and emotional harm by requiring researchers to obtain informed consent from research subjects.

From an IRB perspective, human subjects regulation of interview research seeks to protect respondents from such things as invasion of privacy, breaches of confidentiality or anonymity, and distress caused by topics raised in the interview process itself. But from the standpoint of understanding qualitative interviewing, what is interesting about these strictures is not so much the ways they are implemented by the researcher, but the ways they are interpreted by the respondent.

Among dangers or harms in intensive interviewing research from the perspective of the respondent is the act of listening itself. Listening to another speak, for example, is an act that reflects the self back to the respondent, and this may unfold in ways unforeseen by IRBs or researchers themselves. In reflecting on repeat interviews with ex-patients in the Bay Area conducted in the 1950s and Vietnam veterans in the 1990s, I found that

the interviewer becomes dangerous by the simple act of listening: when the speaker has put on the mantle of a new self seeking to bury the old in an unmarked grave, yet must confront the presence of an interviewer who has knowledge of the past self. The listener is also dangerous as a participant in the retelling of the past by a respondent who feels unable to escape from that past and the self constituted by it. (Karner and Warren 1995:81)

Some subjects may not see written consent forms as at all protective. In a study conducted by a University of Southern California graduate student, respondents expressed repeated exasperation with consent forms. This particular study focused on lesbian identities. The researcher's requests for interviews—which included clear promises of confidentiality yet required signed consent forms—were uniformly met with exasperated refusals by prospective respondents. The contradiction between requiring signed consent

forms, which prospective respondents perceived as going to the government funding agency, and promising confidentiality was too great. The researcher resolved the problem by shifting to oral, tape-recorded consent.

In the team qualitative interview study in which I participated in the late 1980s (Warren and Levy 1991), in which we sought interviews with elderly ECT recipients, their relatives, hospital psychiatrists, and hospital administrators, none of the patients or relatives took issue with the consent forms. But most of the hospital psychiatrists and administrators waved them away as "too official." They were willing to talk with us, but they were not willing to put their names to any documents that might involve them in future litigation. Curiously enough, such responses are often not discovered until *after* the interview process has begun, the start of which the consent form is meant to regulate.

The logic of informed consent presumes that the respondent will understand the intent of the research, as it is explained by the researcher or a consent letter. However, there are many indications in the literature on qualitative interviewing that the researcher's understanding may not match the interviewer's from the start, may shift over time, or may be "confused." The following extract from an interview with a Bay Area ex-patient—whom the researcher had interviewed at least 50 times over a 36-month period—illustrates the dynamics involved:

She began by asking what kind of a psychologist I was. . . . "You said that you were working on a project. I was wondering what your field was. . . . at times, as I said, I was confused about what your interest was in the family, whether you were prying or whether you were just surveying to see how the family was getting along, with your connection with the hospital in your field, whether it has helped out or whether it was part

of it—it wasn't really that, it was just simple explanation of the confusement of it all." (Warren and Karner 1990: 123)

SETTING UP THE INTERVIEW

Once the researcher identifies respondents, she or he must ask them if they will agree to be interviewed, a process that usually accompanies obtaining informed consent. In particular, the time and place of the interview needs to be decided. The received wisdom on how to accomplish this is highly varied, with some commentators advising particular venues and specific kinds of scheduling (see Seidman 1998) and others leaving this largely an open question (for example, see Kvale 1996).

In my experience, the continuum of responses to these preliminary matters can range from outright refusal to welcoming agreement, with every variation in between. In the original Bay Area study, one husband refused to be interviewed at all. More generally, a willingness, even an eagerness, to talk about oneself in interviews is quite commonly reported, at least in the American context. Indeed, as Rubin and Rubin (1995) note:

At a basic level, people like to talk about themselves: they enjoy the sociability of a long discussion and are pleased that somebody is interested in them. . . . you come along and say, yes, what you know is valuable, it should not be lost, teach me, and through me, teach others. (P. 103)

Setting up the interview and actually making it happen are two different things. Generations of qualitative interviewers have been admonished to schedule interviews at times and in places convenient to respondents, but they may find that even this is problematic. For example, an undergraduate sociology student at the University of Kansas had, with great difficulty,

scheduled a focus group session for six students to talk about the issue of going to school and working at the same time. When the scheduled time for the group to meet expired, he ran into my office and breathlessly announced that not one of the six had appeared. Although this incident may be extreme, it is not uncommon for respondents to forget, simply not show up, or in other ways delay or prevent the actual completion of the interview.

But let us continue with those interviews that do move ahead. Armed with a list of questions, a fact sheet for demographic information, the informed consent letter, and the requisite tape recorder and backup pencil and paper, the interviewer meets the respondent at the agreed-upon location. The location itself may have been negotiated. In the Bay Area study, the female respondents, once out of the hospital, did not know quite where to meet their male interviewers. The home seemed out of the question—what would the neighbors say? And the same might be said for the coffee shop across the road. On the other hand, a journey to the researchers' offices, although far from the gaze of prying eyes, was logistically difficult, given child-care and household responsibilities. These ex-patient interviews were replete with discussion and discomfort over the issue of where to meet; in the summer, interviewers sometimes resolved the problem by meeting with respondents in the outdoors, in a garden or on a park bench. Most interviews were eventually completed, but their locations were far from being the result of a well-defined method of procedure. In retrospect, it is evident that the negotiation of perspectives on this matter filtered many of these preliminary issues, just as many seasoned qualitative researchers have noted that such negotiations indeed reverberate throughout the interview process itself.

A respondent is, by definition, someone who responds—someone who is willing and able to talk to the interviewer. But the respondent is also raced, classed, and gendered as well as being situated in the

present moment, with anticipatory notions of what an interview might entail. All this, too, will reverberate in the forthcoming interview. Nancy Ammerman's (1987) ethnographic study of fundamentalist Christians, for example, illustrates the religious, class, and educational perspectives from which her respondents anticipated interviews:

My role as an interviewer often placed an initial distance between me and my subjects that was not present in my role as a participant observer. . . . a good many people approached the interview full of apprehension about what it would be like to be interviewed by someone who was getting a Ph.D. from Yale. After they had cleaned their houses, prepared special food, and even bought new clothes, some still worried about whether they would know the "right" answers and why I had chosen them instead of someone who was a stronger Christian or had been in the church longer or who had a more interesting testimony. (P. 13)

Clearly, the procedural staging of the qualitative interview develops both extemporaneously and methodically within the social relations of the participants.

◆ The Qualitative Interviewing Process

We now turn to the interview process itself, in particular to the meaning making involved as it relates to the social interaction of the participants. This has been a common topic in the interview methods literature for years (see DeSantis 1980; Suchman and Jordan 1990; Peneff 1988). Meaning making is especially pertinent to qualitative researchers because their constructionist leanings bring the interview process itself

within the purview of the designated research topic. The social contexts of the interview process are not viewed as something to be controlled, as they are in standardized survey interviews, but instead are seen as an important part of meaning making in its own right. Qualitative researchers, in other words, treat the unfolding social contexts of the interview as data, not as something that, under ideal conditions, can be eliminated from the interview process.

To illustrate these unfolding social contexts, I begin at the very start of the interview, when the tape recorder is set up, and end after it is over, with the "echoes" that can follow the respondent and researcher into their other lives. Between the beginning and the echoes, interviews can take many directions. Here, I depict two such directions: currents of the clinical and the sociable—of loyalty and disloyalty—that occurred in situations where one interviewer interviewed spouses (separately), and issues of gender and power in feminist interviewing.
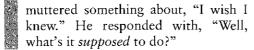
THE TAPE RECORDER AND ITS MEANINGS

The interview often begins as the interviewer's tape recorder is set up amid friendly greetings, creating a particular social context for the interview conversation. For several decades, the conventional wisdom has been that qualitative interviews should be audiotaped, and perhaps even videotaped (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995:78). But does the respondent remain basically unaffected by this? Not only might turning on a tape recorder alter the ensuing conversation, creating a particular context for what is said, but the meanings of audio- or videotaping may be different to different respondents, whose perspectives on the matter are likely to vary by social class and age, for example.

Tape recording has historical resonances. The tape recorder itself, ubiquitous in recent decades, was a novelty at the time

of the Bay Area study; indeed, the first half of the study was conducted with the eight interviewers taking handwritten notes. When tape recorders were introduced, they were a source of exclamation and discussion on the part of the respondents, who would bring their children into the room to examine and discuss the then-bulky instruments. But times and expectations change. In my study of older women married to younger men, the one working-class Hispanic couple I interviewed met me at their front door with exclamations of disappointment over my small and insignificant tape recorder. Their concept of the "interview"—shaped by the TV program *Eye on L.A.*—had led them to expect me to arrive with a video camera, perhaps even a TV camera crew. What Paul Atkinson and David Silverman (1997) call "the interview society" seems to have constructed a new, postmodern, social context for interview data, perhaps making the interview itself the characteristic format for personal narratives (see Gubrium and Holstein, Chapter 1, this volume).

In the process of conducting qualitative interviews, many of us have encountered the "on and off the record" associations that respondents have with recording devices. In perhaps the majority of interviews that I have conducted, supervised, or analyzed, from the 1960s through the 1990s, respondents have continued to speak after the tape recorders have been turned off. This seems to occur for two reasons: (a) The respondent wants to talk about his or her own, rather than the interviewer's, concerns; and (b) the respondent does not want to talk "on the record" about issues that might be dangerous or personally damaging. For example, my notes from the Bay Area study show that an interview with one husband was extended past its conclusion, with the husband offering some telling remarks about ECT that had not been forthcoming in the interview proper:

As I packed up the tape recorder, Mr. W. asked me what ECT does for people. I muttered something about, "I wish I knew." He responded with, "Well, what's it *supposed* to do?"

In another instance, as I turned off the tape recorder in a 1980s interview with a hospital psychiatrist concerning ECT, the psychiatrist said, "Now that we can talk off the record, I will tell you about billing." It is a hallmark of qualitative interviewing that "unrecorded" data of this kind are as important as those derived from tape recordings.

SHIFTING CONTEXTS

Whatever the training and intentions of the interviewer, the social interaction of the qualitative interview may unfold in unexpected ways. This unfolding is even more complex when interviews are repeated over time. Once again, the interview process itself can be treated as an important source of data. In the Bay Area interviews, for example, "clinical" perspectives emerged in interviews with the women patients and ex-patients, whereas "distancing" perspectives emerged with both the ex-patients and their husbands after the wives' release from hospitalization. Although interviewers were trained to be nonpartisan with these husbands and wives, they nevertheless were at times treated as partisan.

In their training, the Bay Area study interviewers were instructed not to act as clinicians during the study. One psychiatrist warned that "any sort of regular relationship was bound to be therapeutic (or antitherapeutic) notwithstanding our 'intentions' " (Warren 1985:74). And from the point of view expressed in interviewers' accounts, it was apparent that this psychiatrist's warnings were appropriate. The women patients and ex-patients asked the researchers for help, advice, and opinions, as did their husbands. "Transference" also seemed to affect the interactions between respondents and interviewers (Laslett and Rapoport 1975; Warren 1985). After one

interview with patient Joyce Noon on April 3, 1959, the interviewer commented:

I had originally anticipated that I would stop the interview after about one tape, but since Joyce seemed to be getting some benefit from talking to me and expressing her feelings, I went on for another tape to give her further opportunity to do so. (Warren 1985:80)

In the ex-patient phase of the Bay Area study, the issue of the interviewer as dangerous listener was especially salient. Some of the women and their husbands sought to distance themselves from the women's "old selves," a distancing that extended to the researcher. This, in turn, affected the social interactions within these interviews. For example, ex-patient June Mark said that

she cannot fully participate in the research simply because the research in itself signifies the stigma of deviance which she is struggling to avoid. . . . "You keep asking a lot of questions . . . things I want to forget about. . . . It's not normal, my talking to you. . . . It's just that I am reminded I'm a patient. If you're a patient, you're always a patient." (Field notes)

Despite her strong reservations, June continued to participate, as did all but one of the respondents. However, they did try to redirect the interviews into more sociable, everyday—in June Mark's word, "normal"—channels. For example, in response to one interviewer's "How are you?" the respondent answered "How are *you*?" in a pointed attempt at role reversal (Warren 1987:261). This rather explicit attempt at reconstructing the interaction not only altered the social context of the interview, changing it from an interview with an ex-patient to one with another person, it presented itself as data in the sense that it documented, on that occasion, the normalizing work of everyday life for this population. This is one of those many points in

qualitative interviews when the interview becomes ethnographic.

Building a context for sociability, rather than data gathering, was especially apparent in posthospital interviews with Ann Rand. One of the interviewer's notes in this case reads:

Repeated that she would only see [me] again if she would have her over to her house. While the interviewer was evasive, Ann said, "Then I suppose you still see me as a patient. To me you are either a friend or some kind of authority, now which is it? The way I see it, you either see me as a friend or a patient." (Warren 1987:261)

Another note, this one concerning Jack Oren's interview, reads, "Mr. Oren asked me if I wanted to join them for dinner, and was rather insistent about this despite my repeated declining" (Warren 1987:261).

Other respondents turned the psychiatric tables on the interviewers, interpreting *them* clinically, as the following note indicates:

[Referring to the interviewer], Jack Oren said, "I think that you're a kid that missed happiness somewhere along the line." He then started speculating about my past life and thought that something had happened to me . . . to make me feel like that. Mr. Oren first was critical about my interviewing technique, then started to question me about my life, and so on. (Warren 1987:62)

But not all of the ex-patients sought to release themselves from the researcher's grasp on their past selves, or saw this as dangerous. Some continued to therapeutize the researcher and the interviews, as the following notes about two respondents suggest:

I had the feeling that Irene James was desperately trying to gain some control over her feelings and thoughts by talk-

ing about them to me.... Irene says that when I arrive for my interview that seems reassuring. (Warren 1987:262)

I asked Shirley Arlen if she would see a psychiatrist and she said no, she couldn't afford it, then all she would do is talk, and she feels she would do better just talking to me. (Warren 1987:262)

In the Bay Area study, each of the eight female and male interviewers spoke with both the mental patients and their husbands. Each wife and husband knew that the other was being interviewed by the same person, forming a triadic relationship. One consequence of this arrangement was that the interviewer was incorporated into the respondents' attempts to find out and pass on information and opinions concerning, mainly, the wife's mental condition at the time. In such a situation, the interviewer is supposed to be, in Georg Simmel's (1950) words, a nonpartisan who either

stands above the contrasting interests and opinions [of the dyad] and is actually not concerned with them, or . . . is equally concerned with them. . . . the non-partisan may make the interaction between the parties, and between himself and them, a means for his own purposes. (Pp. 149-50)

Regarding the latter point, it is characteristic of qualitative interviewing that it is structured to take these options seriously, generating new data in the process. It was clear in the Bay Area transcripts that respondents took varied perspectives in the interview, some of which were far from being neutral sources of information.

Interviewed husbands often asked the interviewer about their wives, and when they did not hear what they wanted, some became testy:

Mr. Sand told me that he didn't see any point going on [with the interviews]....

He asked me if I had talked to his wife that day and when I did not answer at once he repeated the question and I finally told him that I did.... He told me that this wasn't going to help him anyway, and besides which, I knew things about what was going on at the hospital with his wife, and I didn't tell him a thing about it. (Warren 1987:266)

The respondents' varied perspectives in these triadic relationships—perhaps centered on secrecy in relation to oneself or loyalty in relation to another—are as significant for what they reveal or conceal, in terms of data, as they are indicators of interview rapport. Here, again, the ethnographic character of the qualitative interview is evident. For example, Bay Area ex-patient Joan Baker agreed to continue with her interviews but kept them secret from her husband. She felt he would interpret her being interviewed as evidence that she was still mentally ill (Warren 1987: 267). Similarly, in a different research context, a woman sociologist, commenting on a draft of an article on interviewing, conveyed her thoughts about an interview she had just completed and her husband's forthcoming one:

I was conscious all through the interview of trying to be honest with [the interviewer] but not to say anything that would seem disloyal to [husband]. She was going to interview him next, and I kept wondering if she would say anything to him that might make him feel I had been disloyal to him. (Harkess and Warren 1993:334)

GENDER AS A SOCIAL CONTEXT

Although race, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, and age have received increasing attention in the interviewing literature, it is gender to which qualitative researchers have been most attentive in sociology (Benney, Hughes, and Starr 1956;

Luff 1999). In the early years of the Chicago school, the authoritative, question-asking status of the interviewer was unproblematic, the gender of the interviewer either unacknowledged or presumptively male. In time, however,

the interviewer with "no gender," like the ethnographer as "any person," ceded place during the century to the male interviewer interviewing both women and men (Kinsey's model. . .). . . . During the modern era, accounts of what made an interview go smoothly and produce valid data was contested terrain: any polite and dignified interviewer (Palmer 1928), a male interviewer (Cressey 1920/1986) or a female interviewer with a female respondent (Oakley 1981). . . . Not to mention the female "sociability specialist" of the 1980s wresting secret information from reluctant male and female nude beach habitués. (Warren and Hackney 2000:37-38, 42)

In a historical shift in disciplinary perspectives, feminist interviewers have sought, over the past several decades, to change the social interactions of the interview from being authoritative, sociable, or therapeutic to being expressly egalitarian. By the 1970s, women interviewers were being encouraged to interview other women from the empathic standpoint of gender. By the 1980s, it was commonplace to speak of a special genre of "feminist interviewing" (DeVault 1986; Oakley 1981). In the late 1990s, however, exceptions to, and critiques of, the idea of feminist interviewing appeared and the consideration of respondent subjectivity became more complex (see in this volume Reinharz and Chase, Chapter 11; DeVault and McCoy, Chapter 36). The standpoints of race, ethnicity, nationality, and sexual orientation were proposed as de-essentializing femaleness. Thus "women interviewing women" was complicated by whether or not one participant was Third World and one First, one lesbian

and one heterosexual, or one religious and radical right and the other left-leaning and feminist (Blee 1991; Luff 1999).

Even where both interviewer and respondent are women, interviews may not be with "those whose standpoints the researcher shares" in terms of "religious/ secular, feminist/antifeminist, or liberal/ heterosexist" (Luff 1999). For example, Luff (1999) discusses how her preconceptions affected her interviews with British "moral right" (what American sociologists might call "moral majority") women. She points out that the disciplinary perspectives of sociologists are often secular, feminist, antihomophobic, and politically left-leaning. Her respondents reversed all of these perspectives; they were religious, antifeminist, homophobic, and politically right-wing. Furthermore, as middle-class, semipublic figures, they were "relatively powerful" as well as potentially hostile (p. 687). Retelling "moments of rapport" in her research with these women, Luff concludes that "the researcher, as much as the participant, draws on her own conflicting, often contradictory aspects of identity as resources in the interaction," adding that

the emphasis on power-sharing and the vulnerability of the researched that has characterized much feminist methodology . . . may come from tendencies within feminist research to study the "powerless" and therefore may not be transferable, indeed may be counter-productive, to the development of feminist theory and practice in research with the "powerful." (P. 692)

By the 1990s, some feminist researchers had come to recognize that women interviewing women might not work (Hertz 1996) or might be ethically problematic (Luff 1999). In her interviews with military men and their wives concerning gender integration in the military, Rosanna Hertz (1996) found that the men were uncomfortable "trying to explain . . . their position to the two female interviewers who were

outside of male camaraderie" (p. 256). But Hertz also found that the women respondents had even less to say than the men; she surmised that this was because the status she shared with them as women was overshadowed by educational, social class, and marital differences (p. 256). Indeed, Luff (1999:698) points out that rapport—and trust-enhancing interview strategies such as not arguing, saying "I see" and "um," smiling, and maintaining a polite tone of voice—can make even (liberal) women interviewing (right-wing) women seem deceitful, "falling somewhere between the covert and overt" in social research.

There is general agreement in the qualitative interviewing literature that women interviewing men presents special problems, given the obduracy of the interpersonal dominance involved (Arendell 1997; Warren and Hackney 2000). This gender problem was exacerbated for Terry Arendell (1997) in a study where the topic of the interview was divorce. The topic created an interaction in which male respondents spoke forcefully of their betrayal by women to another woman who was the interviewer. Arendell found that from the initial point of contact, the interview became a proving ground for masculinity and a site for the exercise of male definitions and sometimes against all women). These men immediately "took charge" of the interview process and topic and attempted to "place" Arendell as married or unmarried, available or not, male basher or nice girl. Their "assertion of superiority" involved both the denigration of women in general and the assumption that their knowledge and insights were superior to Arendell's. Their handling of the interview (for it was they who handled) ranged from chivalry to sexual harassment (Warren and Hackney 2000:37).

POSTINTERVIEW ECHOES

Like most things, qualitative interviews come to an end, with respondents and in-

terviewers returning to their respective life worlds. For the respondent, there may be no more thoughts of the interview (DeSantis 1980); for the interviewer, the main thoughts may be of the way in which the interview fits into the overall analysis. But sometimes—perhaps especially where interviews are combined with ethnographic research—there may be echoes of the interview within the life worlds of the interviewer, the respondent, or both. This possibility was recognized in the 1970s and 1980s literature on feminist interviewing; Luff (1999) refers to this early "assumption that feminists can, or indeed should have a powerful affect [sic] on participants' lives" as "patronizing" (p. 692). Nevertheless, such echoes can occur.

Two lesbian sociology graduate students at the University of Kansas who did ethnographic and interview research on their own communities concluded that the interviewing experience created an emotional distance between themselves and their respondents. In one case, this extended to emotional distance between the researcher herself and her lesbian identity (Warren 2000). In the research on ECT recipients and their families (Warren and Levy 1991), several of our collaborators interviewed university colleagues—friends or acquaintances—concerning their elderly, hospitalized parents. In more than one instance during the interviews, divining our possible critique of the use of ECT on elderly mental patients, our colleagues became upset with us, accusing us of not understanding their situation and, in one case, of no longer being a friend. We suspected, too, that one or two respondents simply did not tell us the truth about their family members, avoiding the sort of confrontation we had had with others. In one case, a prior friendship between an interviewer and respondent was severely strained for many months following the interview.

Qualitative interviewing is distinctive in this regard. Interviewers do not necessarily end their relationships with respondents at

the conclusion of their interviews, as is typically done in survey interviewing. Rather, the perspectives of, and information conveyed in, interviews echo in the ongoing relations of research participants.

◆ Interpretation, Self, and Others

The interviewer, like the respondent, participates in the interview from historically grounded biographical as well as disciplinary perspectives. Biographical perspectives may frame entire analyses or affect the selection of illustrative quotes. In her book *Worlds of Pain* (1976), for example, Lillian Rubin tells the reader that her interpretation of working-class life was shaped by her experiences as a working-class child, left-wing political activist, and clinical practitioner. She saw pain, and only pain, in working-class lives: "Often people implored, even commanded me, to believe they had happy home lives as children. I tried . . . [but the] dominant memories of childhood for me, as for the people I met, are of pain and deprivation" (p. 46).

When, in the late 1980s, I was analyzing transcripts of ECT experiences, I saw myself in respondents' comments, something that was highly emotional for me. In sifting through the many thousands of pages of interviews, I chose the following extract from ex-patient Shirley Arlen's case material to illustrate and exemplify the negative aspects of the biographical memory loss attendant upon EST:

[Shirley Arlen], although she had been reminded by others of her son's existence, appeared to have lost her affective memory of him *as* her child: "I guess I feel sort of strange with him. . . . I just don't even feel like he's mine, for some reason. . . . I think he's nine months now . . . I really don't know. I can't even remember when he was born." (Warren 1988:295)

This comment was particularly poignant for me because while I was writing *Madwives* (Warren 1987) I was a new mother myself, and could imagine nothing more horrible than the emotional separation from a baby.

Extending the metaphor of the qualitative interviewer as a traveler to strange lands (Kvale 1996), we see that the interview, like the ethnography, is about self as well as other (Warren 2000). As Rubin (1976) says of her interview research about working-class pain: "No matter how far we travel, we can never leave our roots behind. I found they claimed me at unexpected times, in unexpected places" (p. 13).

As I noted at the start of this chapter, the purpose of qualitative interviewing (and associated fieldwork) is to understand others' meaning making. As many qualitative researchers report, I came early on to the point at which I viewed those meanings as intersecting with my own story. Yet, even with our knowledge of the different perspectives from which respondents and researchers talk and write, the empathic appreciation of others' meanings is not an easy task, especially across various cultural divides. In *Learning How to Ask* (1986), Charles Briggs cautions researchers against importing one set of linguistic and cultural assumptions into another when interviewing between cultures. But it is evident that even within the same culture, meanings that seem clear to the interviewer can be unshared (see in this volume Dunbar, Rodriguez, and Parker, Chapter 14; Briggs, Chapter 44). In a study of "affirmative action" in the South in the 1970s, an employer, when asked his definition of the term, replied:

Uh . . . try to get a job done in as orderly a manner and please our customers . . . so it's firm as possible . . . to get a day's work for a day's pay. . . . And it would be affirmative action. And it's almost impossible. (Harkess and Warren 1994:273)

Indeed, even the most seemingly commonplace terms may vary surprisingly in meaning in the context of particular life worlds. In the Bay Area study, sociologist and interviewer Sheldon Messinger talked approximately 25 times between November 1957 and July 1958 with ex-patient Kate White (Messinger and Warren 1984). Among the "delusions" that precipitated Kate White's diagnosis and hospitalization was the idea that she and her husband were "homosexual." In the commonsense meanings of the 1950s, homosexuality referenced, as it does now, same-gender erotic preferences, attraction, or behavior (although there would be differences now in the social sensibilities associated with the category). But as Messinger delved into the meaning Kate assigned to the term, it became clear that what she was talking about was not desire or eroticism at all, but a social role. She wanted to work outside the home and men did that, so she talked of herself as homosexual. During her hospitalization, her husband had enjoyed keeping house and taking care of the children—ostensibly a woman's role—so perhaps he was also homosexual. For Kate White, homosexuality referenced gender roles, not sexual desire; in fact, she was having an extramarital heterosexual affair at the time she was interviewed.

Messinger and Warren (1984) also point out that stories such as that of Kate White's "homosexuality" are grounded in important relationships and adaptations that exist outside the purview of the interview. This observation, of course, highlights the necessity of using ethnographic linkages to flesh out the social contexts of meaning making. The social situation of the interview may not be the most important one for researchers who are trying to understand the meanings ("frameworks or labels") used by respondents. "These frameworks or labels must be examined in their interaction contexts. It is there that they do their work" (Messinger and Warren 1984:205), not in the interview or with the interviewer.

So we return full circle to the close relationship between qualitative interviewing and ethnography. I have always found experiences and stories such as Kate White's to point me in the direction of multiple rather than one-shot interviews, or of ethnography combined with interviews rather than interviews alone. But, as Holstein and Gubrium (1995) point out, even in the one-shot interview, the respondent may shift viewpoints and tell different tales.

In a 1970s ethnographic study of Weight Watchers (Laslett and Warren 1975), I had noticed that a large portion of each meeting was taken up with the discussion of food—what was permitted, how to cook, and so on. This came as no surprise to me. Flush with the then-current ardor for "triangulation," I embarked on interviews to "validate" my observations.[8] When I asked my first respondent, "Do you think that the meetings focus on food?" she responded, to my astonishment, with a definite "Oh no!" About one and a half hours later, however—much of which was spent discussing food—she said, "About that earlier question of yours—well, it does seem like we spend an awful lot of time discussing food doesn't it!" Among the ethnographic qualities of the qualitative interview itself is that the interview unfolds reflexively as each participant looks at the world through the other's eyes, incorporating both self and other into the process of interpretation.

Although asking, listening, talking, and hearing are important, so are seeing and feeling as means of apprehending the social world. Although the frame of talking and listening may be apt for conceiving telephone interviews, the frame of social interaction accords better with the face-to-face qualitative interview. In the social interaction of the qualitative interview, the perspectives of the interviewer and the respondent dance together for the moment but also extend outward in social space and backward and forward in time. Both are gendered, aged, and otherwise embodied, one person (perhaps) thinking about her

topic, questions, rapport, consent forms, and the tape recorder, not to mention feeling nervous. The other is (perhaps) preoccupied with her relationships outside the interview, pressing tasks left undone, seeking information, getting help, or being loyal. These are the working selves and others at the center of qualitative interviewing. And that is just the beginning.

■ Notes

1. Although interviews may be conducted with more than one interviewer and more than one respondent, I confine this discussion to the dyadic interview situation. See Chapter 7 of this volume for a discussion of group interviewing.

2. Some approaches to interviewing, notably those taking a postmodern perspective, focus more on the interviewer's viewpoint than on the respondent's. Sometimes they fuse these perspectives. Norman Denzin's (1987) study of self-help groups of which the interviewer or ethnographer is a member is a case in point.

3. Consider the differences in presentation apparent in the following diversely authored depictions: Spradley (1979), Seidman (1998), Weiss (1994), Holstein and Gubrium (1995), Kvale (1996), and Rubin and Rubin (1995).

4. This research includes both one-shot interviews, which I suspect is the form encoun-

tered in most interview research, and repeat interviews, which can be considered a kind of longitudinal design.

5. In a section of his book titled "When Not to Interview," Kvale (1996) notes, "In recent social research there has been an inflationary use of interviews; also in areas better covered by other methods." He adds, "If you want to study people's behavior and their interaction with the environment, the observations of field studies will usually give more valid knowledge than merely asking subjects about their behavior" (p. 104).

6. Indeed, the folk wisdom of qualitative research regarding design includes the caution that researchers should not consult the literature until after the research has gotten under way and they have apprehended a sense of the subject matter. This, of course, works against design as formally understood.

7. Although there are few reasons set forth for the numbers of respondents appropriate in qualitative studies, there seem to be norms. To have a nonethnographic qualitative interview study published, the minimum number of interviews seems to fall in the range of 20 to 30. Respondent groups also generally come in round numbers, such as 20 or 35.

8. The idea of triangulation was discredited in the 1980s, but it is apparently staging a comeback (see Arksey and Knight, 1999; relatedly, see also Atkinson and Coffey, Chapter 38, this volume).

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