

to connect to the experiences of those in it? In our community college study, we had to have enough participants to reflect vocational and liberal arts faculty, men, women, and minorities, and age and experience ranges. We also considered faculty with advanced degrees and without degrees. In addition, we were reluctant to interview only one person in any particular category.

The other criterion is saturation of information. A number of writers (Douglas, 1976; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rubin & Rubin, 1995) discuss a point in a study at which the interviewer begins to hear the same information reported. He or she is no longer learning anything new. Douglas (1985) is even bold enough to attempt to assess when that began to happen in his studies. If he had to pick a number, he said, it would be 25 participants.

I would be reluctant to establish such a number. "Enough" is an interactive reflection of every step of the interview process and different for each study and each researcher. The criteria of sufficiency and saturation are useful, but practical exigencies of time, money, and other resources also play a role, especially in doctoral research. On the other hand, if I were to err, I would err on the side of more rather than less. I have seen some graduate students struggle to make sense of data that are just too thin because they did not interview enough participants. Interviewing fewer participants may save time earlier in the study, but may add complications and frustration at the point of working with, analyzing, and interpreting the interview data.

The method of in-depth, phenomenological interviewing applied to a sample of participants who all experience similar structural and social conditions gives enormous power to the stories of a relatively few participants. Researchers can figure out ahead of time the range of sites and people that they would like to sample and set a goal for a certain number of participants in the study. At some point, however, the interviewer may recognize that he or she is not learning anything decidedly new and that the process of interviewing itself is becoming laborious rather than pleasurable (Bertaux, 1981). That is a time to say "enough."

Affirming Informed Consent

First-time interviewers tend to be hesitant about securing their participants' informed, written consent to be interviewed. Some interviewers worry that telling people what they are studying will skew the results of their study. They also tend to minimize participants' sense of risk at being involved in an interview. The interviewers have no doubt about their own good intentions, but they do not anticipate the type of material that can be generated in an in-depth interview.

In-depth interviews, however, ask participants to reconstruct their life history as it relates to the subject of inquiry. In the process, a measure of intimacy can develop between interviewers and participants that leads the participants to share aspects of their lives that, if misused, could leave them extremely vulnerable. Participants have the right to be protected against such vulnerability (Kelman, 1977). Furthermore, interviewers can protect themselves against misunderstanding through the process of seeking informed consent, which requires them to be explicit about the range and purpose of their study in a way that makes them be clear about what they are doing. Finally, given the extensiveness of the interview process and the method of following up on what the participants have to say (see Chapter 6), providing people ahead of time with as much information as possible about each aspect of the study is not likely to skew the results of 4 ½ hours of interviewing.

The relatively recent impetus toward protecting rights of research participants stems from the reaction to the disregard for human dignity perpetrated during World War II by researchers in concentration camps controlled by Nazi Germany. The Nuremberg trials resulted in the Nuremberg Code adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1946, which stated that "the voluntary consent of the human subject is absolutely essential" (Reynolds, 1979, p. 436).

After World War II, federal guidelines concerning the protection of the rights of human subjects were issued in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. (See Applebaum, Lidz, & Meisel, 1987; Faden & Beauchamp, 1986.) The guidelines were originally applied broadly to all research supported directly by federal funds and to all conducted in institutions receiving federal funds.

That broad interpretation was narrowed significantly in 1981 to cover only the former (Reynolds, 1982). The 1996 regulations maintained the narrower focus on research involving human subjects conducted or supported by federal departments or agencies or otherwise subject to regulation by a federal agency, such as the food and drug administration (Protection of Human Subjects, 1996, §§ 46.101 & 46.102). However, most institutions of higher education, in order to demonstrate their adherence to the spirit and intent of federal guidelines, continue to require informed consent in all research involving human subjects unless no risk at all is involved.

Much research on "normal educational practices" in educational settings is technically exempted from the informed-consent requirement by the federal guidelines (§ 46.101). However, research in educational settings in which

(i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and

(ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation (§ 46.101, (b) (i) & (ii)).

are subject to the federal guideline protecting the rights of human subjects.

The basic federal policy presupposed a survey type of interviewing in which the identity of the participant is not known, the data collected are not sensitive, and no harm can be envisioned for the participants (Reynolds, 1982). In-depth interviewing, however, cannot be likened to routine survey interviewing. First, the topic of inquiry, no matter how apparently innocent, is placed within the total life context of the participant. That contextual exploration is likely to raise sensitive issues. Second, the interviews are recorded and the identity of the participant, even disguised, is potentially discernible by someone who knows him or her. Third, the potential vulnerability of the participant cannot be calculated ahead of time.

THE CONSENT FORM

For the reasons explained above, even though an interviewer's research may not be funded by federal sources and informed consent of

participants is therefore not legally necessary, and seeking explicit informed written consent may provide some complexities, I think it is both ethically and methodologically desirable to seek it. The consent of the participant is most effectively indicated by his or her signature on an informed consent form.

The consent form should cover the following main points:

1. *Who, for whom, and to what end?* The form should tell the participants what they are being asked to do, by whom, and for what purpose. Participants must know the identity of the researcher, his or her affiliations if any, and whom to contact for information if they have problems with the research process.
2. *Risks and vulnerability.* It should inform the participants of any risks they might be taking by participating in the research. A participant might not face physical risk but might be made vulnerable by what he or she says. The consent form should indicate what steps the researcher is taking to reduce such a possibility.
3. *Right to participate or not.* It should indicate that participation in the research is voluntary. Participants are free to participate or not participate in the research without prejudice to them.
4. *Rights of review and withdrawal from the process.* It should inform the participants what rights they have in the process, particularly the right to review the material and the right to withdraw from the process.
5. *Anonymity.* It should indicate whether or not participants' names will be used in the study, whether any other names will be used, or whether pseudonyms will be substituted.
6. *Dissemination.* It should indicate how the results of the study will be disseminated. The form should allow the participant to indicate clearly his or her agreement to releasing the interview material to be disseminated as indicated. This point should also be clear about whether participants can expect to benefit in any way, monetarily or otherwise, from participating in the study.
7. *Special conditions for children.* In the case of children, the consent form must be signed by the child's parent or legal guardian and assented to as appropriate by the child. (Protection of Human Subjects, 1996, § 46.408).

In what follows I explicate, in order, the issues and complexities involved in each of the seven major points of an informed consent form. I have avoided the temptation to replicate a sample of an informed consent form because I think merely copying such an example could lead a researcher into trouble. I urge doctoral candidates and other researchers to grapple with the logic of each of the points listed above. Then they can

develop a written consent form based on their understanding of the logic and the particulars of their research project.

1. WHO, FOR WHOM, AND TO WHAT END?

As explained earlier, in the first of the three interviews, participants reconstruct aspects of their personal histories that may be quite personal. In the second of the three interviews, participants are asked to reconstruct the details of their experience within the subject area being studied. In the third interview, participants are asked what meaning they make of their experience. Participants have a right to know the full identity of the person requesting this type of information. For example, if the interviewer is both an employee of the school district in which he or she is interviewing and a doctoral candidate at a university, the interviewer should state both relevant parts of his or her identity. Participants also have the right to know that the work is being done as part of a research project that will lead to a dissertation, or any other purpose that the research is serving. Furthermore, students talking about their experiences in classes, and teachers, counselors, and administrators talking about their experiences at work, have the right to be told explicitly with whom the interview material will be shared, and in what forum it will be disseminated (see point 6). Moreover, researchers have an obligation to structure their research process so that they will not be likely to share raw interview data with anyone who would be in a position to capitalize on the information or to make participants vulnerable as a result (see point 2).

If the study is sponsored in any way, that sponsorship should be made clear to participants. Sponsorship may range from a school system's endorsement of and interest in the results to active financial support of the research. No matter where on the continuum the support falls, the interviewer has an obligation to inform the participant of the nature of the sponsorship. The participant must be free to engage or not to engage in the research knowing who else is interested in it and to what possible uses it might be put.

2, 3, AND 4. RISKS, VULNERABILITY, AND RIGHTS

The notion of risks and rights in the informed consent process derives from the fact that much research is conducted in the medical field, in which the participants may actually be at some physical risk. But even in interviewing studies, participants may be made vulnerable by the re-

searcher's publicly sharing aspects of their lives that they consider private and that they may feel may injure their dignity (Kelman, 1977).

The Oral History Association issues guidelines for those doing oral history interviewing (Oral History Association, 1992). Its seventh guideline in a section entitled "Responsibility to Interviewees" states: "Interviewers should guard against possible exploitation of interviewees" (p. 7). Researchers must therefore consider what steps they can take to reduce the threat of exploiting their participants, or making them vulnerable, or somehow injuring their dignity. These steps may often be connected to the rights the participants have in the process of being interviewed. (The Oral History Association's guidelines are particular to the task of oral history interviewing. They overlap but are not completely relevant to the type of research interviewing described in this book. They represent, however, the most explicit set of guidelines that I have seen for dealing with a wide range of ethical and professional issues that those doing interviewing research may face.)

Participation in Research Must Be Voluntary

The first right, as stated earlier, is that participation in research must be completely voluntary and that volunteering is based on being informed. If a participant chooses not to participate in research, such a choice cannot be prejudicial to the participant. For example, if a researcher is doing research in a classroom, students (and their parents) have a right to say that they will not participate. Their choosing not to participate can in no way affect their progress in the class or their grade.

The Right to Withdraw and to Review

A second and third right is that participants have the right to withdraw from the research and review the interview material, and ask that portions not be used.

The three 90-minute interviews are designed to build a framework for a relationship between the interviewer and the participant that is equitable and leads to a reasonable level of trust between the two. The intimate process of a participant's placing experience in the context of his or her life and meeting repeatedly over a period of a few weeks for discussion may lead a participant to divulge information that he or she later regrets sharing. The researcher must make clear that the participant has the right to withdraw from the study at any time during the interviews or within a specified time after they are completed. In addition, the participant must have the right to withhold any part of the interview data he or she chooses.

What is less clear is what right the participant has to review and approve the way the interviewer has worked with the material gathered in the study. The interviewer may well choose to work out a way for the participant to have access to both the raw data and the way he or she has worked with that information in writing up the study. The interviewer may offer to share copies of the audiotapes or transcriptions of those tapes. Such sharing would facilitate the participant's ability to review the interview experience and to decide whether to ask the interviewer not to use certain parts of the material.

Finally, the interviewer may offer to share the entire report before publication or the parts of the final report that most concern a participant. Some scholars of qualitative research consider this step to be crucial for the credibility of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the interview work I have done, I have often used extensive profiles of the participants crafted in their own words from the interview transcripts. When I have crafted a profile from a participant's experience, I contact the person and offer to share the profile with her or him before I disseminate it. If the participant asks to review the profile, I send it. I do so with the stipulation that I want to know if it contains anything inaccurate or unfair to the larger interview. I also want to know if there is anything in the profile with which the participant is uncomfortable.

Although I would not disseminate anything that a participant told me at this stage would make him or her vulnerable, neither would I give the person automatic censure on matters of interpretation. One participant in our community college study asked me to delete a portion of the profile I had developed of him, in his own words, in which he said that he was not proud of working at his community college. I agreed to delete the passage to which he was referring because he felt that it could make him vulnerable if he were identified. But later in an interpretive section of the study, not tied to any single participant, I discussed the issue of community college faculty's sense of status in their jobs, keeping what that participant had told me in mind.

At some point the interviewer-researcher has to become responsible for what he or she writes. In this instance, I felt somewhat compromised in taking that responsibility because the participant had asked me to delete important information that had informed part of my analysis. On the other hand, I was committed to preserving the dignity of participants and not making them vulnerable as a result of their participation in the study. As in many other aspects of interviewing research, the researcher has to balance conflicting claims. The interviewer must be willing to take ownership of the material and be responsible for the consequences. I do not think the researcher can shift the burden of that responsibility to the participant,

and yet the participant has an interest in how the researcher carries it out.

Whatever the interviewer decides to do about the participant's rights of review, as in the case of remuneration (see point 6), the most important point is to be explicit. Inequity in interviewing results more often from a researcher's being unclear about the framework within which interviewer and participant are working than from any decision on a specific issue. (For an interesting discussion of what can happen when an interviewer does not clarify the responsibility she intended to take for the interviewing material, see Lightfoot, 1983.)

Confidentiality and the Legal Status of Data

Participants also have a right to know in what form material from their interviews will be shared with the public. I have often seen drafts of written consent forms in which interviewers promise that the material they gather will be kept confidential. Keeping material "confidential" means no one sees it other than the interviewer. Although it may be possible in medical or survey research to keep individual responses confidential and to report only in aggregate terms, such a promise is inconsistent with the purpose and method of in-depth interviewing research. Most people who interview do so because they want to make the experience of individuals accessible to others. In addition, research information is not privileged and is thereby subject to subpoena by the courts (Reynolds, 1979).

The first of the Principles of Professional Responsibility of the American Anthropological Association (1983) states:

In research, anthropologists' paramount responsibility is to those they study. When there is a conflict of interest, these individuals must come first. Anthropologists must do everything in their power to protect the physical, social, and psychological welfare and to honor the dignity and privacy of those studied. (p. 1)

When we were doing our study of community college faculty, we interviewed a small number of students to understand how their experience related to what the faculty were telling us. In one of the interviews, a student participant revealed that he occasionally sold drugs on the campus. Our research team discussed the situation. We knew that legally we could not keep the information confidential; nor ethically could we make the participant vulnerable through his participation in our research.

We were in a very uncomfortable position. Although it was not likely

to happen, this particular person might be arrested, and our interview data somehow subpoenaed and used against him. Though we did not condone his pushing marijuana on the campus, we would not have known of it through any way other than our interviews. We did not feel that we could make him more vulnerable than he already was as a result of participating in our study. As interesting as the story he was telling us was, we decided that the best course of action was to terminate the interviews and destroy the tapes. It was not an altogether comfortable resolution. (See Yow, 1994, pp. 93-95, for an excellent discussion of this issue.)

5. ANONYMITY

Extensive use of participants' words leads to one of the central issues in informed consent, that of anonymity. The standard assumption is that participants in in-depth interview studies will remain anonymous. That assumption has implications for interviewers from the moment they start their research. In their proposals, for instance, which are usually public and accessible documents, they should avoid listing names of sites or of people that could be traced later when the research is completed.

Interviewers working with in-depth interview material, however, cannot guarantee anonymity. The center of the research is the experience of the participants, gathered within the context of their lives. Because a considerable part of that experience may be shared in the research report, a reader who knows the participant may recognize him or her.

Nonetheless, the interviewer can work to protect the anonymity of the participant and can say how that will be done in the written consent form. For example, the participant has the right to know who will transcribe the interview audiotapes. If it is not to be the interviewer, the interviewer can tell what steps will be taken to assure that the transcriber does not misuse information about the identity of the participant. Second, the participant can be assured that transcriptions will contain only initials for all proper names, so that even if a casual reader were somehow to see the transcripts, no proper names would be present. Third, the interviewer can promise to use pseudonyms in the final report. Fourth, in some cases the interviewer can choose to actively disguise the participant's identity.

In her study *The Contextual Realities of Being a Lesbian Physical Educator: Living in Two Worlds*, Woods (1990) was concerned that her participants would be vulnerable if they could be identified. As part of her written consent form, she made the following statement and outlined the steps that she would take to protect—but not guarantee—her participants' anonymity:

In a study of this nature, the anonymity of participants is a priority. Although anonymity can not be fully guaranteed, the following are steps taken at each stage of the research process to protect your anonymity.

A. Access to participants has been gained in two ways: (a) my personal contacts; and (b) contacts given by those being interviewed. All initial contacts with a potential participant will be made by the person or participant suggesting the teacher to be interviewed. I will contact the potential participant directly only if she has agreed to discuss the possibility of being interviewed.

B. All interviews will take place in a safe space to be designated by the participant.

C. The researcher will not interview more than one teacher employed in a single district.

D. With the exception of the dissertation committee chairperson, I will not discuss with the dissertation committee or anyone else any names, teaching locations or identifying particulars of the participants.

E. Interview transcripts may be completed by two persons: (a) myself; and/or (b) a reputable and discrete transcriber. If someone other than myself transcribes the audio tapes, I will erase from the audio-tapes all names and identifying particulars before submitting them for transcription.

F. As stated, pseudonyms will be substituted in the transcripts for all names of persons, schools, school districts, cities, towns, and counties. Every step will be taken to adequately disguise the participant's identity and teaching location in any published materials or presentations.

G. The transcripts will remain in the direct physical possession of the researcher. All audio-tapes and consent forms are kept in a safety deposit box. Tapes will be destroyed upon acceptance of the dissertation or, at your request, will be returned to you. (p. 224)

Woods felt that her participants would be taking risks by participating in her study. To protect them and to establish conditions in which they would feel safe to talk, she devised the most effective and practical means she could to minimize those risks. Although I was concerned about her promise to destroy the audiotapes of the interviews, the care she took to protect her participants' identity without guaranteeing them anonymity, and her explicitness with potential participants, seemed to me a model of forthrightness.

As Woods indicates, if the likelihood of a participant's being identified is high, and if being so identified would make him or her vulnerable, it may be best to disguise the person's identity. This measure, which is more active than giving the participant a pseudonym, might involve changing the location in which the person resides or the specific nature of the activity being reconstructed. For example, in *In the Words of the Faculty* (Seidman, 1985), I changed the state in which one participant taught as

well as the subject she taught. The guidelines the researcher must use in judging the appropriateness of such changes are whether the likelihood of a participant's being identified is high, whether he or she would be made vulnerable if identified, and whether the disguise can be effected in a way that does not distort the data.

Informed consent assumes but does not require anonymity (Reynolds, 1979). What it does require is that the participants be informed, before the interviews begin, as to whether steps will be taken to protect their identity. At least one writer (Mishler, 1986), however, argues that anonymity is not automatically a good thing and that participants should be given the choice as to whether they wish their names to be used. My experience leads me to suggest that interviews be conducted under the assumption that the interviewer will take steps to protect the anonymity of the participants. After the interview is completed, the participants will be in a better position to judge whether they wish to conceal their identities.

6. DISSEMINATION

Joint Ownership of Interview Material

Valerie Raleigh Yow (1994) has an excellent chapter about the ethics and legalities of interviewing, especially as they apply to the informed consent process. She takes the position (at least partially based on Hirsch, 1982) that the copyright law of 1976 establishes that the moment the researcher shuts off the tape recorder, the tape belongs jointly to both the participant and the researcher. The idea of joint ownership means that the researcher must secure from the participant a release to use the interview material as the researcher plans to use it.

The Extensive Use of Interview Data

One aspect of the researcher's plans that should be clear to the participant is the extent to which the researcher might use the material from the interview. In Chapter 8, I discuss ways of working with the material and disseminating it. Suffice it to say here that the intent of this type of interviewing is to use as much as possible the words of the participants to illuminate the experience they are reconstructing in their interviews.

A conventional expectation participants have is that researchers use quotations from interviews. But in reporting on in-depth interviewing, researchers include lengthy excerpts from interview transcripts rather than

short quotations. As an element of informed consent, participants have the right to know how extensively the interviewer might use the data from his or her interview.

Possible Uses of Interview Data

I always suggest to doctoral candidates that they cast the widest net they think possible in outlining the various uses they will make of information collected. On first instinct, many students limit the intended use to their dissertation. This means that if they later decide to publish something from their dissertation, or to base a presentation for a conference on their research, they will then be obligated to go back to their participants to seek additional permission to use the material in ways not originally listed in the consent form.

Remuneration

A major issue is whether the participant can expect any remuneration for the interviews. Such remuneration could range from pay on a per-interview basis to the promise that if the interviews lead to commercial publication, the participant would have the right to some proportion of the royalties. The issue is a complicated one. Anything more than a token payment would seriously threaten to bias the potential participants' motivation for taking part in the study. On the other hand, some researchers see interviewers as potentially expropriating the words of the participants for their own uses in an exploitative manner (Patai, 1987). Establishing an equitable percentage of royalties to allocate to a participant, given all the hours of work that go into an interview study before and after the actual interview, is complicated. Except in the case of a best seller, a percentage of royalties may not make much financial sense.

In the studies I have conducted, I have not offered remuneration to the participants. At the conclusion of an interview, I normally present a token of my appreciation. I think there are other levels of reciprocity that occur in the interview process that can substitute for financial remuneration. Participants have told me and my research associates that the occasion of their interview was the first time anybody had ever sat down to talk about their work with them. Participants have said that they appreciated being listened to and that participating in the interviews was an important experience for them.

Each interviewer has to figure out for him- or herself the issue of remuneration. Whatever he or she decides should be explicit in the written consent form. It should state clearly either that the participant is agreeing

not to make any financial claim upon the interviewer or what the basis of the remuneration will be. Inequity and certainly discomfort are more likely to arise from an unclear position about the issue of money than from a clear decision either to remunerate or not. The principle should be to give the participant the opportunity to join or not to join the study on the basis of explicit information.

7. SPECIAL CONDITIONS FOR CHILDREN

If participants have not attained the legal age of consent to treatments or procedures involved in research (age 18 in most jurisdictions), interviewers must obtain the informed consent of a parent or legal guardian. If appropriate, researchers should see the "assent" of the child, but must seek the "permission" of a parent or guardian. In cases with "greater than minimal risk" and little direct benefit to the participant, both parents and each guardian must give permission (Protection of Human Subjects, 1996, §§ 46.402 & 46.408).

THE COMPLEXITIES OF AFFIRMING WRITTEN CONSENT

When guidelines for seeking informed consent were issued in the 1960s and 1970s by federal agencies, many researchers saw the benefits, but some felt that the costs outweighed them. Experienced social scientists questioned many facets of informed written consent, especially for participant observation settings that may be fluid, unfixed, and therefore difficult ones in which to seek explicit consent (Thorne, 1980).

In a response to the first edition of this book, sociologist Kathy Charmaz commented on the complexity of the informed consent process. She thought what I had written about informed consent was excellent in the case of interviewing professionals; but when interviewing working-class participants, she had found that the informed consent form causes many to "feel uncomfortable and sets a suspicious tone to the interview" (K. Charmaz, personal communication, March 5, 1992).

In further discussion of the issue, Charmaz (personal communication, March 23 & 30, 1997) indicated that at times in her research, despite her attempts to use a form that was short, clear, and nonbureaucratic, the process of asking the participant to sign the form could contribute to establishing a sense of authority and dominance in the interviewing relationship. I recognize that feeling in my own work. When a participant signs the written consent form, I feel a sense of having gotten what I

needed to proceed and a small measure of control that comes with that accomplishment.

Richard G. Mitchell, Jr.'s monograph, *Secrecy and Fieldwork* (1993), also raises serious issues about the informed consent process. Mitchell critiques the easy substitution of the form of ethical procedure for the substance of ethical responsibility on the part of the researcher. That responsibility, according to Mitchell, is to understand and report as fully as possible the experience and the social world of our participants from their perspective. Mitchell also points out that the requirement to seek informed consent protects the weak and the powerful alike. He argues that in some instances, such as his research on "survivalists," fieldwork carried out in secret, with no pretense of seeking informed consent, is necessary if the researcher hopes to gain the essential understanding of the participants he or she may be studying.

Mitchell is provocative and useful in pointing out the subtexts and complexities inherent in the process of informed consent. Doctoral candidates with whom I have worked, for example, have indicated that the approach to interviewing I describe in this book can be problematic when interviewing elites and others in positions of power. (See the discussion of interviewing elites in Chapter 7.) Such participants may either refuse to sign the consent form or, having signed the consent form, take other steps to avoid giving real insight into their perspectives.

On the other hand, one distinct advantage of the informed consent process is that developing the written consent form requires that interviewers think through the structure and processes of their study, making them explicit not only to their participants but to themselves. Developing a satisfactory written consent form requires that interviewers be clear about their purposes, methods, and relationship with their participants. In addition to allowing the potential participant to decide whether to participate in the study on the basis of sufficient information, the informed consent form serves as a contract of sorts, which can also protect interviewers in cases of misunderstanding. My experience is that its clarity can lead a researcher to a more equitable relationship with participants and to the increased effectiveness that almost always flows from equity.

However, the ethical considerations of informed consent are complex. There are settings and situations in which the process of seeking informed consent is neutral and even positive for the interviewing relationship. I think those are ones in which the power relationship between the participant and the interviewer is reasonably equitable. In these instances, issues of age, gender, class, and race (see Chapter 7) and the sensitivities that may be implicit in the topic of the interview do not immediately give the interviewer or the participant a sense of dominance.

As Charmaz (personal communication, March 23, 1997) pointed out, however, there are some situations and settings in which the necessity to seek informed consent may hinder the interviewing process, at least initially. In situations in which participants feel vulnerable because of the sensitive nature of the topic of the interview, they may hesitate to sign the consent form. Participants who, for a range of reasons, have a distrust of forms and formalistic language may balk at being asked to sign. Participants who feel the power relationship between them and the interviewer is inequitable may feel uneasy and awkward when asked to review and sign the form.

My experience is that the interviewer can deal with some of this type of uneasiness by thoughtfulness and care in the process of going over the form with the participant. In addition, the process of interviewing the participant three times and developing and sustaining a relationship over a period of time can relieve initial discomfort to some extent and can assuage the suspicion that may have arisen at the time that the researcher asked the participant to read and sign the informed consent form. In circumstances in which the interviewer does not have the ability to build a relationship over time, the informed consent process may be inhibiting. While necessary, seeking informed consent is not without its complexities. It is designed to foster equity between the interviewer and the participant. It may at times inhibit it. It is clear that the informed consent process is only the beginning and not the end of researchers' ethical responsibilities toward their participants and their research.

Technique Isn't Everything, But It Is a Lot

It is tempting to say that interviewing is an art, a reflection of the personality of the interviewer, and cannot be taught. This line of thinking implies that either you are good at it or you are not. But that is only half true. Researchers can learn techniques and skills of interviewing. What follows is a discussion of those skills as I have come to understand them from my own experience of interviewing and that of others.

LISTEN MORE, TALK LESS

Listening is the most important skill in interviewing. The hardest work for most interviewers is to keep quiet and to listen actively. Many books about interviewing concentrate on the types of questions that interviewers ask, but I want to start this chapter by talking about the type of listening the interviewer must do.

Interviewers must listen on at least three levels. First, they must listen to what the participant is saying. They must concentrate on the substance to make sure that they understand it and to assess whether what they are hearing is as detailed and complete as they would like it to be. They must concentrate so that they internalize what participants say. Later, interviewers' questions will often flow from this earlier listening.

On a second level, interviewers must listen for what George Steiner (1978) calls "inner voice," as opposed to an outer, more public voice. An outer, or public, voice always reflects an awareness of the audience. It is not untrue; it is guarded. It is a voice that participants would use if they were talking to an audience of 300 in an auditorium.

There is a language of the outer voice to which interviewers can become sensitive. For example, whenever I hear participants talk about