



# INTERVIEW RESEARCH AND STRATEGIES

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# Agenda

- Methodology vs methods
- Qualitative interviews
  1. Definitions, purpose
  2. Philosophical underpinnings
  3. Ethics

# Methodology vs methods

- **Methods:** “techniques or procedures we use to collect and analyze data” (King et al. 2019)
- **Methodology:** “a process where the design of the research and choice of particular methods (and the justification of these in relation to the research project) are made evident” (King et al. 2019)
  - “approach” or “perspective”
  - Requires the philosophical and theoretical positions informing the research process
  - Requires assumptions underlying the methodology

# Methodology vs methods

Paradigm and perspectives (ontology, epistemology)

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graph TD; A[Paradigm and perspectives (ontology, epistemology)] --> B[Research design/strategies of enquiry (methodology)]; B --> C[Method(s) for data generation and analysis]; C --> D[Interpretation & quality assessment];
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The diagram consists of four horizontal bars of decreasing length, stacked vertically. Each bar is a different color and contains text. Grey arrows point downwards from the right side of each bar to the top of the bar below it, indicating a sequential flow from top to bottom.

Research design/strategies of enquiry (methodology)

Method(s) for data generation and analysis

Interpretation & quality assessment

# 1. What is an interview?

- Interchange of views between people conversing about a theme of mutual interest
- Conversation with a purpose:
  - to enter the perceptual schemes of a 'living' source
  - to generate information on views, attitudes, experience, opinions, etc.

# Interviewing: traditional views

- Simple and self-evident – *“You just do it!”*
- Straightforward method – step by step from contact to completion
  - Asymmetrical relationship: powerful interviewer – passive respondent
  - ‘Objective’ and impartial interviewer
  - Uncover psychological or social realities and simply extracts the information (if the researcher asks ‘the right’ questions)
- Emergent themes, meanings or questions are less important

# New trends in interviewing

- A more sensitive and constructivist perspective
  - Participants as active subjects, storytellers
  - Researchers not uninvolved, objective, and invisible observers
- Significance of emotions, feelings, motives, desires, biases, (self-)deception
- Interactional co-construction of 'reality'
- Collaboration in narrative construction

# Types of interviews – structure

- Quantitative vs. qualitative
- Close-ended vs. open-ended
- Structured vs. semi- and non-structured
- Individual vs. group (focus groups)
- “Surface” vs in-depth



# Types of interviews - participants

- Expert interviews
- Elite interviews
- Children and teenage interviews
- 'Ordinary' interviews

# Expert and elite interviews

- Use experts and/or elites as participants
- Usually one-time, uncovering exclusive, non-public knowledge
- Often considered as different to 'ordinary' interviews – peculiar, unique, demanding research setting (access, participants, status and power in interview relationship, sensitivity and ethics)

# Expert vs. elite interviews

## Experts

- Knowledgeable citizens (privileged access to information and training)
- Decision-making power
- Institutional authority to construct realities
- Offer expert opinions, analyse and solve problems
- Active in community affairs regardless of their social status
- Economic, political and governmental decision-makers, NGOs etc.

## Elites

- Most powerful actors in society (birth, wealth, education)
- Knowledge or information from perspective of power and privilege
- Superior social, intellectual, economic status and power
- Making decisions or influencing processes important for many
- Political, business, professional, media elites (power relationships)

# What can interviews give us?

- In-depth information about the social life (places and settings in which we have not lived)
- Access to knowledge, experience, views, perceptions, attitudes, thoughts, feelings, activities and their interpretations
- Stories and narratives
- Access to observation of behaviours and beyond (e.g., environment, relationships, others)
- Understanding of the nature of the phenomena, uncover/reconstruct hidden meanings, develop (new) knowledge and explanations and generate ideas and concepts

## 2. Philosophical underpinnings: positivist understanding

- Traditional model
- Social world is objectively knowable
- The 'truth' is out there waiting to be discovered
- Extract information: interrogation
- Data are independent of social interaction

# Interpretivist understanding

- Postmodern/constructivist model
- Social phenomena depend on meanings
- Data emerge dynamically through dialogue and in context
- Learn how to make sense of the world: interaction

# 3. Ethics in interview research

- **Participants first, you second, research third**
  - Psychological, emotional, physical, and social wellbeing
  - Protect your participants: data protection, especially personal, sensitive and off the record information
  - Transparency of research purpose/researcher's background
- Relationship between the interviewer and the participant: how far can we go?
- Data handling and analysis
- Community relations

# General ethical guidelines

## Informed consent

- Voluntary participation and the right to withdrawal on the basis of complete and open information about aims and purposes of the study
- Data recording

## Deception

- Avoid deliberate misrepresentation prior to or during the interview

## Privacy and confidentiality

- Protecting the identity
- Who are you sharing 'raw' data with? How are you storing your data?
- Where/how are they going to be published?

## Accuracy

- As much interview material as possible presented in the participants' own words, attitudes and thoughts



# Ethical review process

- Institutions and universities increasingly sensitive to ethics and adopting policies
  - Ethical committees
  - Ethics forms and templates
  - Ethical research codes of conduct setting the minimum of ethical practice
- **Follow your institutional procedures and requirements**
  - **MUNI:** The Research *Ethics Committee* (REC)
    - Covers every project that involves research on human subjects

# Consider...

- Informed consent
- The right to withdraw
- 'Off the record'
- Assessing risk or harm (physical safety and welfare of the researcher and the participant)
- Accuracy, honesty, integrity and deception
- Confidentiality and anonymity
- Use of incentives and payment
- Clarity on the role of researcher
- Ethical treatment of data and data protection