

INFO 272. Qualitative Research Methods

Interviewing - II

Fall 2014

What are we doing when we interview? A reminder.

We started by talking about aspects of ordinary conversation, the Suchman and Jordan article highlighted some of the resources we rely on to realize mutual understanding and to avoid miscommunication between conversation partners

Survey interview practices interfere with many of these ordinary practices (but has some other strengths)

Qualitative interviewing allows the interviewer and the interviewee to make use of these resources – consequently an interview is a negotiation between interviewer and interviewee. The interviewer sets the topic and provides the framework.

So what is the knowledge produced? The knowledge produced is the social justification of belief. It is not an objective representation of some event.

Along with this notion that knowledge is about the social justification of belief there is a corresponding and compatible notion of identity underlying this approach. We accept a sense of individual identity as fluid, you are glimpsing a dimension of identity in the interview – but this is of course subject to variation depending upon this setting. You are not looking for an static underlying identity.

Keeping in mind – your social location matters, mediation through memory, through interviewees self-perception, in relation to other people around. It is not biased from some pure objective reality rather it is a “situated knowledge” and the ways you account for that ‘situation’ in your analysis are important.

The Interview Guide

- ❖ **Your list of questions** (try to keep it short!)
- ❖ Provides a structure, serves as a memory jog
- ❖ Treat it as a **checklist** NOT a script



- So first things first, before you go out to do your interviews...

- Why keep it short? Because if it's too long you may be tempted to charge through it without asking follow up questions, without adequately using probes. A long interview guide can create an oppressive sense of time pressure. Your focus in constructing the interview guide is setting priorities and thinking about the kinds of questions that will get people to speak openly and at length.

<https://flic.kr/p/7eukcs>

The Interview Guide

Think about question groupings and sensible ordering, but don't hold yourself to that order.

Some options:

1. chronological
2. specific to general
3. most to least important

Remember that while you are not engaging in an ordinary conversation -- you can make use of the resources of ordinary conversational interaction.

The interview guide is not in control – you and your interviewee share control...you cede control to the interviewee as much as possible while still covering the topics you are interested in and getting the depth and specificity of response you are seeking.

The Interview Guide

- ❖ **demographic facts (ask at the end)** – age, education, ethnicity, place of birth, occupation, religion
- ❖ **meta-questions** - what questions do you think I should have asked? Do you have any questions for me?
- ❖ change as needed after a couple of interviews

Exercise: Good and Bad Interviews

Common Mistakes (and how to avoid)

ignoring prime opportunities to probe	listen, write 'probes' in your notes as you hear them
interrupting	wait, be patient, keep interview guide short
unshakeable assumptions	listen
embedding answers in your questions	wait, be patient
asking more than one question at a time	plan out in interview guide