Qualitative interviews reconsidered

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Interview
Semi-structured interview

- Questions-answers
  - Open questions
  - Follow-up questions/probes
    - You mentioned ____ tell me more about that.
    - You talked about ____, describe a specific example of that.
  - Closed questions
Open question

- Non-directive questions that allow participants to choose their own terms to provide descriptions

Purpose:
- Generate data in which participants describe topics in their own words
- Elicit participants’ initiation of topics

Assumptions:
- Make no assumptions about participants’ answers
- Interview subject may highlight what they take to be important
Examples of open questions

• Invitations to tell stories
  o Tell me how you came to be involved in long-distance running.

• “Grand tour” and “mini-tour”
  o Describe a typical training routine for preparing for a 10K run.
  o Describe what you usually do when you run each day.

Closed questions

• Provide possible responses in the question
• Request specific facts or information
• Limit interviewees’ responses

Purpose:
• Generate data in the researcher’s pre-established categories
• Avoid participants’ initiation of topics

Assumptions:
• Researcher is “neutral”
• Interview subject is a “vessel of answers”

Implicit closed questions

- How many minutes a week have you exercised in the last week?
- What time of day do you usually exercise?
Explicit closed questions

• Do you agree or disagree with the idea that joining a gym will increase your activity levels?
• How frequently have you engaged in 5-K fun runs over the last 12 months: Never, 1 or 2, 3 or 4, 5 or more?
• How would you rate the information on integrating exercise into your life provided by X program on a scale of 1-5, where 1 is very poor, and 5 is excellent?
Use of closed questions in qualitative interviews

Purpose of clarification, e.g.,

• Earlier you talked about XXX..... Would it be correct to say YYY.....?

• You mentioned XXXX.... If I’ve understood you correctly ......
Types of interviews

- Phenomenological interviews
- Hermeneutic interviews
- Ethnographic interviews
- Feminist interviews
- The reflexive interview
- Intraviews
Phenomenological interviews

Interviews are conducted to generate:

• detailed and in-depth descriptions of participants’ experiences about a phenomenon
• studies informed by phenomenological theories


Hermeneutic interviews

- Researchers and participants play the role of co-inquirers, and engage in a shared dialogue that evolves through questions and responses.
- Greater emphasis on the shared dialogue (rather than non-directive questioning)

Ethnographic interviews

- explore the meanings that people ascribe to actions and events in their cultural worlds, expressed in their own language
- informal and formal interviews that draw on participant observation in extended fieldwork

Feminist interviews

- used to advance women’s causes in a patriarchal society.
- researchers aim to work with participants in respectful and ethical ways and to allow women’s voices to be heard.
- recognition of the importance of language and discourse

The reflexive interview

- Interview as a vehicle for producing performance texts and performance ethnographies about self and society


Intraviews

- resituate the interview as a process-based, embodied and emplaced “intra-active event”
- the interview is a co-creation among multiple bodies and force.
- intra = “within” displaces inter = “between” (p. 733).

Preparing for interviews

- Formulating interview guides
- Reflecting on the topic
- Ethical review
- Technology
- Recruitment

Conducting interviews

- Gaining informed consent
- Asking questions
- Contextual issues:
  - Cross cultural interviewing/translation
  - Special populations

After the interview

- Transcription
- Data analysis and representation
“Good” interviewing

• appropriate preparation
• demonstration of respect for interviewees
• intensive listening by the interviewer
• development of thoughtful interview guides
• interview guides that include fewer questions
• formulation of short, open-ended questions
• flexibility on the part of the interviewer to deviate from prior plans when necessary
• effective use of follow up questions to elicit extended descriptions
• the ability to help participants tell their stories
Terry Gross
Fresh Air, National Public Radio
http://www.npr.org/programs/fresh-air/
Challenges in interviews

Engaging in interviews
- Difficult topics, risky research
- Unexpected events, problematic locations
- Reluctant interviewees
- Interviewee-interviewer relationships
- Reliability of interview data
Challenges after interviews

Data analysis and representation

• Representation of the “other”
• Negotiating conflicting interpretations
• Working with sensitive data
• Anonymizing data
Research design

• Interviews as stand-alone or mixed method
  o Documentary sources to verify oral history accounts
  o Visual methods to support elicitation of data
    • Photo-elicitation
  o Photos as illustrations
  o Participant observation/ethnographic interviewing

• How many interviews?
  o One-off interviews/multiple interviews over time

Critiques

- **Interview data as evidence**
  - Co-construction of interview data
  - Socially situated nature of interview data
  - Reliability of data (memory)

- **Analysis and representation of data**
  - Omits questions/interviewer’s work
  - Does not attend to details of production of talk


New developments

Australia’s foreign affairs minister, Julie Bishop, simply loves using emojis to make a point. In a BuzzFeed News exclusive, we sat down with her for the world’s first political emoji interview.
New technologies

- Synchronous online interviews
- Email interviews
- Text messaging

References
