

Chapter 4

A Dramaturgical Look at Interviewing

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INTERVIEWING MAY BE DEFINED simply as a conversation with a purpose. Specifically, the purpose is to gather information. This standard definition of interviewing has been discussed by Denzin (1978), Spradley (1979), Patton (2002), Salkind (2008), Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (2007), Babbie (2007), Leedy and Ormrod (2004), and Bogdan and Knopp Biklen (2002).

Unfortunately, the consensus on how to conduct an interview is not nearly as high. Interviewing and training manuals vary from long lists of specific do's and don'ts to lengthy, abstract, pseudotheoretical discussions on empathy, intuition, and motivation. The extensive literature on interviewing contains numerous descriptions of the interviewing process. In some cases, being a good interviewer is described as an innate ability or quality possessed only by certain people. Interviewing, from this perspective, has been described as an art rather than a skill or a science (Grobel, 2004; Fontana & Frey, 1998). In other cases, interviewing has been described as a game in which the respondent receives intrinsic rewards for participation (Holmstrom, cited in Manning, 1967). In still other instances, interviewing has been described as a technical skill you can learn in the same way you might learn how to change a flat tire. In this case, an interviewer is like a laborer or a hired hand (Roth, 1966). Many sources describe interviewing as some sort of face-to-face social interaction, although exactly what distinguishes this type of interaction from others is often left to the imagination (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001, 2004; Salkind, 2008; Warren & Karner, 2005).

To be sure, there is some element of truth to each of these preceding characterizations. Certainly, anybody can be instructed in the basic orientations, strategies, procedures, and repertoire (to be discussed later in this

chapter) of interviewing. Gorden (1992), for example, offers a clear, step-by-step description of how to go about the process of interviewing. To a large extent, Gorden (1992) and others offer the basic rules of the game (see, e.g., Seidman, 2006). Furthermore, there is assuredly something extraordinary (if not unnatural) about a conversation in which one participant has an explicitly or implicitly scripted set of lines and the other participant does not. To judge any of these characteristics exclusively, however, seems inadequate. Just as some artists and actors are perceived by their peers to be exceptional while others in the field are viewed as mediocre, so can this assessment be made about interviewers. The previous characterizations have served little more than to circumscribe what might be termed the possible range of an interviewer's ability; they have not added appreciably to the depth of understanding about the process of interviewing or how you might go about mastering this process.

This chapter is devoted to the latter effort and draws on the symbolic interactionist paradigm—the stream of symbolic interaction more commonly referred to as *dramaturgy*.

Dramaturgy and Interviewing

This chapter attempts to illustrate dramaturgy's beneficial effects on interviewing beyond the interviewer training stage. Discussions will include types of interview structures, survey construction, the interviewer role and the role of the interviewer (social roles played by the investigator), rapport, reactivity, and accessing difficult or sensitive materials.¹

It has been suggested by Denzin (2001, p. 26) that we inhabit a performance-based, dramaturgical culture. Indeed, even in research, the line between performer and audience sometimes blurs, and the whole process becomes a dramatic performance. In the broader context of society, there are likewise blurred boundaries between everyday life, theatrical performances on MTV, VH1, videotapes, television, and the movies. Reality-based television shows have significantly influenced what we now consider entertainment, further blurring the lines between performance, dramaturgy, and everyday life. Research, then, is being swept along with the other aspects of culture, and it too is being significantly affected by the blurring of lines between performance and reality. Research, particularly field research, is sometimes divided into two separate phases—namely, getting in and analysis (Shaffir, Stebbins, & Turowetz, 1980). *Getting in* is typically defined as various techniques and procedures intended to secure access to a setting, its participants, and knowledge about phenomena and activities being observed (Friedman, 1991, 2007). *Analysis* makes sense of the

information accessed during the getting-in phase. As a consequence, the literal boundaries between these two phases may also become blurred—assuming they ever really existed during the process of research.

Nonetheless, this chapter will clarify the two phases and consider each phase as distinct. In the case of the former, getting in means learning the ropes of various skills and techniques necessary for effective interviewing (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Gorden, 1992; Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2005; Shaffir et al., 1980; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Regarding the latter, as this chapter will show, there are a number of ways you may go about making sense out of accessed information.

Let us look at the process of interviewing, specifically the notion of interviewing, as an “encounter” (Goffman, 1967), as a “social interaction” (Fontana & Frey, 1998), or as a “face-to-face interactionary performance” (Babbie, 2007). All discussions of interviewing are guided by some model or image of the interview situation, and here interviewing is perceived as a “social performance” (Goffman, 1959), organized around the premise that interviewing is best accomplished if guided by a dramaturgical model (Burke, 1957, 1966; see also Edgley, 2003).

Dramaturgy, as a theoretical perspective, involves the elements and language of theater, stagecraft, and stage management. This theoretical perspective is derived in part from the symbolic interactionists' general assumption that humans perceive and interact in reality through the use of symbols. Drama, then, is a mode of symbolic action in which some individuals act symbolically for others who watch symbolically. In the case of the former, the term used to describe acting individuals is usually simply *actors*. In the case of the latter, the reference typically is *social audience* or simply *audience*.

The symbolic action that passes between actor and audience is called a *social performance* or a *performance*. In this chapter, the language of dramaturgy is applied metaphorically to a concrete situation—namely, the interview. More theoretical and detailed discussions of dramaturgy may be found in Burke (1957, 1966), Goffman (1959), Messenger, Sampson, and Towne (1962) (see also Johnson, Langley, Melin, & Whiltington, 2007; and Punch, 2005). The dramaturgical orientation offered in this chapter is similar in some ways to what Douglas (1985) terms *creative interviewing*. Creative interviewing involves using a set of techniques to move past the mere words and sentences exchanged during the interview process. It includes creating an appropriate climate for informational exchanges and for mutual disclosures. This means that the interviewer will display his or her own feelings during the interview as well as elicit those of the subject. The dramaturgical model of interviewing presented here is also similar to what

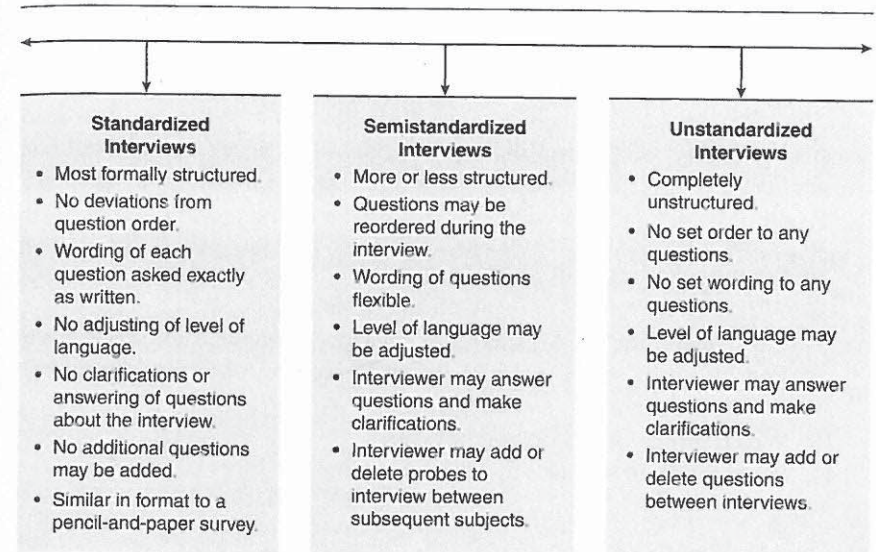
Butler (1997) and Mieniczakowski (1995, 2000) refer to as performance-based or, simply, performance interviews. Performance interviews, then, can be situated in the complex system of discourse, where traditional, everyday, and avant-garde meanings of theater, film, video, ethnography, cinema, performance, text, and audience come together and inform one another (Denzin, 2001). Performance methods differ from other qualitative methods because of the unique sense of performance. In performance, there is immediacy in the literal interview performance, whereas, such immediacy is lacking in the one-dimensional transcript of a traditional interview (Leavy, 2008).

Also similar to the dramaturgical perspective presented here is what Holstein and Gubrium (1995, 2004) call *active interviewing*. From their perspective, the interview is not arbitrary or one-sided. Instead, the interview is viewed as a meaning-making occasion in which the actual circumstance of the meaning construction is important (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, 2004). The proposed dramaturgical model differs most from the active interview in its emphasis on the interviewer *using* the constructed relationship of the interviewer and subject to draw out information from the subject. The various devices used by the dramaturgical interviewer, therefore, move this orientation slightly closer to the creative interviewing model and the more reflexive performance interview.

Types of Interviews

No consideration of interviewing would be complete without some acknowledgment of the major interview structures. These are sometimes referred to as “the family of qualitative interviews” (Rubin & Rubin, 2004). Some sources mention only two interview structures—namely, formal and informal (see, e.g., Fitzgerald & Cox, 2002, pp. 118–119). Other sources refer to this research process as either structured or unstructured (Fontana & Frey, 1994; Leedy & Ormrod, 2004). However, at least three major categories may be identified (Babbie, 2007; Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2007; Merriam, 2001; Nieswiadomy, 2002; Polit & Hungler, 1995): the standardized (formal or structured) interview, the unstandardized (informal or nondirective) interview, and the semistandardized (guided-semistructured or focused) interview. The major difference between these different interview structures is their degree of rigidity with regard to presentational structure. Thus, if we cast them onto an imaginary continuum of formality, they would look a little like the model in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1 Interview Structure Continuum of Formality



The Standardized Interview

The *standardized interview*, as suggested in Figure 4.1, uses a formally structured schedule of interview questions. The interviewers are required to ask subjects to respond to each question, exactly as worded. The rationale here is to offer each subject approximately the same stimulus so that responses to questions, ideally, will be comparable (Babbie, 2007). Researchers using this technique have fairly solid ideas about the things they want to uncover during the interview (Flick, 2006; Merriam, 2001; Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979). In other words, researchers assume that the questions scheduled in their interview instrument are sufficiently comprehensive to elicit from subjects all (or nearly all) information relevant to the study's topic(s). They further assume that all questions have been worded in a manner that allows subjects to understand clearly what they are being asked. Stated in slightly different terms, the wording of each question is equally meaningful to every subject (Kumar, 2005). Finally, they assume that the meaning of each question is identical for every subject. These assumptions, however, remain chiefly “untested articles of faith” (Denzin, 1978, p. 114).

In sum, standardized interviews are designed to elicit information using a set of predetermined questions that are expected to elicit the subjects' thoughts, opinions, and attitudes about study-related issues. Standardized

interviews, thus, operate from the perspective that one's thoughts are intricately related to one's actions. A typical standardized interview might look like this diet history (Berg, 1986):

1. When is the first time you eat or drink on a typical day?
2. What is the first thing you eat?
3. When is the next time you eat or drink?
4. What do you eat or drink?
5. When is the next time you eat or drink?
6. What do you eat or drink?
7. What else do you eat or drink on a typical day?
8. How many times a week do you eat eggs? Cheese? Milk? Fish? Beef? Pork? Beans? Corn? Grits? Bread? Cereal? Ice Cream? Fruits? Vegetables?
9. Which protein foods do you like best?
10. Which protein foods do you not eat?
11. What foods do you like to eat between meals?

The Unstandardized Interview

In contrast to the rigidity of standardized interviews, *unstandardized interviews* do not use schedules of questions and are located on the imaginary continuum (as depicted in Figure 4.1) at the opposite extreme from standardized interviews. Naturally, unstandardized interviews operate from a different set of assumptions. First, interviewers begin with the assumption that they do not know in advance what all the necessary questions are. Consequently, they cannot predetermine fully a list of questions to ask. They also assume that not all subjects will necessarily find equal meaning in like-worded questions—in short, that subjects may possess different vocabularies.

In an unstandardized interview, interviewers must develop, adapt, and generate questions and follow-up probes appropriate to each given situation and the central purpose of the investigation. Schwartz and Jacobs (1979, p. 40) note that this will result in appropriate and relevant questions arising from interactions during the interview itself.

Unstandardized interviews are sometimes used during the course of field research to augment field observations. For example, Diane Barone (2002) undertook a field study that examined literacy teaching and learning in two kindergarten classes at a school considered to be at risk and inadequate by the state. Barone conducted observations in the classrooms and wrote weekly field notes. In addition, however, she included ongoing informal interviews with the teachers throughout the yearlong study. Such unstructured interviews permit researchers to gain additional information about various phenomena they

might observe by asking questions. Unstandardized interviews, however, are not restricted to field research projects, as illustrated by an archival study recently undertaken by Horowitz and her associates (2000). In this study, the researchers were interested in examining the sociocultural disparities in health care. Toward this end, the investigators examined the contents of health care and health articles with regard to racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities. Their research, in some ways, might even be considered chiefly *metatheoretical* (where literature serves as the data of the study). But, in addition to this more archival approach, they also included informal interviews with research, policy, and program experts to assist in developing a framework of programs that addressed disparities (Horowitz, Davis, Palermo, & Vladeck, 2000). Thus, the informal interviews provided important information for these investigators along with the data culled from various published and unpublished articles and documents.

The Semistandardized Interview

As drawn in Figure 4.1, the *semistandardized interview* can be located somewhere between the extremes of the completely standardized and the completely unstandardized interviewing structures. This type of interview involves the implementation of a number of predetermined questions and special topics. These questions are typically asked of each interviewee in a systematic and consistent order, but the interviewers are allowed freedom to digress; that is, the interviewers are permitted (in fact, expected) to probe far beyond the answers to their prepared standardized questions.

Again, certain assumptions underlie this strategy. First, if questions are to be standardized, they must be formulated in words familiar to the people being interviewed (in vocabularies of the subjects). Police officers, for example, do not speak about all categories of persons in a like manner. Special terms they use include “scrots” (derived from the word *scrotum*), used as a derogatory slur when describing an assortment of bad guys; “skinners,” used to describe rapists; “dips” to describe pickpockets; and “clouters,” used to describe persons who break into automobiles to steal things. Questions used in a semistandardized interview can reflect an awareness that individuals understand the world in varying ways (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003). Researchers, thus, approach the world from the subject's perspective. Researchers can accomplish this by adjusting the level of language of given scheduled questions or through unscheduled probes (described in greater detail in the following interview excerpt) that arise from the interview process itself.

One study of Latino men who have sex with other men (Berg et al., 2004; Zellner et al., 2008) used a semistandardized interview schedule. Although

many of the primary questions asked to each of the 35 subjects derived from the predetermined schedule, the men's perceptions were often more fully elaborated after being asked an unscheduled probe. For example, after being asked a question, the subject might have responded with a brief "yes" or "no." In order to elicit additional information, the interviewer would then ask, "And then?" or "Uh huh, could you tell me more about that?" or some similar simple inquiry.

On other occasions the interviewer might have asked another full question seeking additional information. An example of these scheduled and unscheduled probes from interview number 14 illustrates this (Berg, 2002). All questions were asked and answered in Spanish and later translated into English.

Interviewer [Scheduled Question]: How about your family, do they know about your sexual activities?

Subject: Yes, yes, they do know how I am, how I see myself. But they do not like it. On some occasions they tell me that they are going to send me to Mexico. They wanted to bribe me, but that is why I work, so I do not have to depend on them economically.

Interviewer [Scheduled Question]: What do your parents (brothers, sisters, etc.) think about your participation with sex between same masculine genders?

Subject: Okay, my parents found out because I told my sister that I was homosexual, because one of my father's brothers had raped me. My sister then told my father and my parents supported me. If the rest of my family does not support me, I do not care, just as long as my parents accept me, that is enough for me.

Interviewer [Unscheduled Probe]: When your uncle raped you, did he know you were gay?

Subject: Yes.

Interviewer [Unscheduled Probe]: How old were you at the time of the rape?

Subject: I was only eight years old when he raped me.

Interviewer [Unscheduled Probe]: Yes, and then? (pause)

Subject: I was eight years old when my uncle raped me, we were at the ranch, my mother and father went to make a phone call to my brothers who were in the United States so I was left alone with him. I already showed signs of being gay, my uncle took off my clothes, hit me and raped me. I still do not know why he did this to me; after all we were family. He threatened me, and told me to not say anything

or he was going to hurt my parents. But at age thirteen I exploded, I could not keep it in any longer, so I told my sister what was happening. It was already the second time he had raped me. My sister was crying, she hugged me and said that she loved me. She then told my father and he made me confront my uncle. My father thought I was lying to him, but my uncle could not lie; he lowered his head and admitted that he had raped me. My father questioned him on why he did it and his response was that I wanted to do it with a homosexual. But I always ask myself, "Why me?"

Interviewer [Unscheduled Probe]: How old was your uncle?

Subject: He was twenty-six years old and I was eight the first time he raped me. I already knew I was homosexual, but I would have preferred to experience that with the person that I loved, not by being raped. That gets me so upset and I will never forget it. I do not even wish for it to happen to my worst enemy.

In another study, the investigators used a semistandardized interview to draw out the lives and professional work experiences of 12 women, all of whom began working in parole or corrections between 1960 and 2001 (Ireland & Berg, 2006, 2008). The interview focused on various aspects of each woman's experiences working in a largely male-dominated occupation and how they perceived the respect they received—or did not receive—from their male counterparts and the parolees. The flexibility of the semistructured interview allowed the interviewers both to ask a series of regularly structured questions, permitting comparisons across interviews, and to pursue areas spontaneously initiated by the interviewee. This resulted in a much more textured set of accounts from participants than had only scheduled questions been asked.

The Interview Schedule

Traditionally, the term *survey* refers to both interviews and pencil-and-paper questionnaires. In this text, the term *survey*, unless otherwise indicated, is exclusively used in the context of interviewing. Typically, the choice to use an interviewing technique rather than a survey questionnaire technique is based on the selected procedure's ability to provide maximum opportunity for complete and accurate communication of ideas between the researcher and the respondent (Cannell & Kahn, 1968, p. 554). Among other things, this notion of accurate communication of ideas implies that researchers have clear ideas

about the type of information they want to access and about the purpose and aims of their research.

The interview is an especially effective method of collecting information for certain types of research questions and, as noted earlier in this chapter, for addressing certain types of assumptions. Particularly when investigators are interested in understanding the perceptions of participants or learning how participants come to attach certain meanings to phenomena or events, interviewing provides a useful means of access (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 98). However, interviewing is only one of a number of ways researchers can obtain answers to questions. The determination of which data-gathering technique to use is necessarily linked to the type of research question being asked.

For instance, Becker (1963) suggests that if you are interested in knowing how frequently a subject smokes marijuana (how many times daily, weekly, monthly, and so on), then you may effectively use a questionnaire survey. If, however, you are interested in the sensation of marijuana smoking (the emotion-laden sensory experience as perceived by the subject), a more effective means of obtaining this information might be an open-ended interview question (Mutchnick & Berg, 1996).

A similar consideration is necessary when you determine what sort of structure an interview should have. For example, Rossman (1992) used semi-structured interviews in his examination of the development of Superfund community relations plans (Superfunds are federal funds offered to assist communities in environmental clean-up activities). Rossman (1992, p. 107) explains:

Because of the nature of the information collected, applied researchers who develop community relations plans are best advised to use interviews and interviewers. Questionnaires lack the flexibility that is required to capture the subtle character of risk definition, especially a risk that is often defined ambiguously within a community. Risks such as those associated with Superfund sites are a major part of the community's social structure, but are less crystallized than risk associated with crime, or even natural environmental risk.

Conversely, Miller (1986) found that in her study of female street hustlers, an unstructured interview served her purposes best. Miller (1986, p. 26) writes:

Seventy women agreed to taped interviews with me during which they shared with me the details of their lives. Special attention was paid to the initiation of these women into street hustling and the development of a career as a street hustler. Although the same broad topics were introduced during each interview, many of my questions changed over time.

Ellis, Kiesinger, and Tillmann-Healy (1997, p. 121) wanted to gain a more reflexive and intimate understanding of women's emotional experiences and, therefore, decided to use an interactive approach and a more or less unstructured interviewing style:

[We] view interviewing as a collaborative communication process occurring between researchers and respondents, although we do not focus on validity and bias. For us, interactive interviewing involves the sharing of personal and social experiences of both respondents and researchers, who tell (and sometimes write) their stories in the context of a developing relationship.

Thus, when determining what type of interview format to use, you must consider the kinds of questions you want to ask and the sorts of answers you expect to receive. This line of thought naturally leads to consideration of how to create questions and an interview schedule.

Schedule Development

The first step to interview construction has already been implied: Specifically, researchers must determine the nature of their investigation and the objectives of their research. This determination provides the researchers with a starting point from which to begin developing a schedule of questions.

Selltiz et al. (1959), Spradley (1979), Patton (2002), and Polit and Hungler (1995) suggest that researchers begin with a kind of *outline*, listing all the broad categories they feel may be relevant to their study. This preliminary listing allows them to visualize the general format of the schedule. Next, researchers should develop sets of questions relevant to each of the outlined categories.

I typically suggest that the researcher begin by listing out (kind of as a freewrite exercise) all of the conceptual areas that may be relevant to the overall topic under investigation. For example, let's imagine you are seeking to investigate collegiate drinking. After reviewing some of the literature on this topic, you may decide that the following general areas (conceptual areas) will need to be explored in the interview: demographics, family drinking practices, leisure activities, school achievements, personal drinking practices, and involvement in organizations. After listing each of these major conceptual areas in what amount to separate columns, you can begin to list under each, general areas of inquiry—not necessarily specific questions, but items that may be formed into specific questions. Let's consider the first three conceptual areas listed above (the areas listed are not necessarily exhaustive of all that might be listed).

Demographics	Family Drinking Practices	Leisure Activities
Age	Parental drinking	Extracurricular activities
Education	Sibling drinking	Sports involvements
Ethnicity	Grandparent drinking	Social activities
Religious affiliation	Extended family members	Television viewing
Family members	drinking	Video game playing at home
Income	Family drinking situations	Video game playing outside of home
	Family drinking concerns	Reading

Next, you can begin to create relevant questions for each of the items listed under each major conceptual heading. In the case of Demographics, in the example above, you might create the following questions: "What is your date of birth?" for Age, "What would you say is the highest level of education you have completed?" for Education, "With which ethnic group do you see yourself as a formal member?" for Ethnicity, and so forth. You may notice that each of these questions is written in a rather colloquial fashion. This is intentional and allows for a more flowing and conversational interview interaction. You may have to refine, change, shorten, or reword these questions later; but for now, it allows you to begin getting a sense of how many questions you will be asking for each conceptual area.

Question Order (Sequencing), Content, and Style

The specific ordering (sequencing), phrasing, level of language, adherence to subject matter, and general style of questions depend on the educational and social level of the subjects as well as their ethnic or cultural traits, age, and so forth. Additionally, researchers must take into consideration the central aims and focuses of their studies.

Patton (2002, p. 350) suggests the use of a kind of matrix listing question areas such as questions about emotions or feelings (about experiences), knowledge questions (about specific factual items), sensory questions (concerning things one might see or observe), and opinion and value questions (directed at what the individual thinks about something or some experience).

From my perspective, there are no hard and fast rules or rigid recipes for sequencing questions in an interview schedule. However, like a number of others, I suggest beginning with questions that will be fairly easy for the subject

to answer, and which are largely questions that are not sensitive or threatening (Grinnell & Unrau, 2005; Trochim, 2005). In my experience, demographic questions are frequently about educational levels, date of birth, location of residence, ethnicity, religious preferences, and so forth. Many of these sorts of demographic questions are regularly asked of people in their work or schools lives and are likely to receive quick responses with no sense of threat or concern on the part of the interviewee. The underlying rationale for this sort of a question sequencing is that it allows the interviewer and the participant to develop a degree of rapport before more serious and important questions are asked. As well, it fosters a degree of commitment on the part of the interviewee, since he or she will have already invested some time in the interview by answering these easy to answer questions. The following suggests a general sequencing of types or categories of questions:

1. Start with easy, nonthreatening (demographic) questions.
2. Next begin with some of the more important questions for the study topic (preferably not the most sensitive questions)—the questions should stick to a single concept or topic.
3. More sensitive questions can follow (those related to the initiated topic).
4. Validating questions (questions restating important or sensitive questions, worded differently than previously asked)
5. The next important topic or conceptual area of questions (these may include the more or most sensitive questions).
6. Repeat steps 3 and 4, and so on.

It is also important to note that each time you change from one topical area to another, you should use some sort of a transition. This may be a clear statement of what is coming next, such as the following: "Okay, now what I'd like to do is ask some questions about how you spend your leisure time." Or, "The next series of questions will consider how your family feels about drinking." The logic here is to assure that the interviewee is aware of what specific area he or she should be thinking about when answering questions.

In order to draw out the most complete story about various subjects or situations under investigation, four types or styles of questions should be included in the survey instrument: essential questions, extra questions, throw-away questions, and probing questions.

Essential Questions *Essential questions* exclusively concern the central focus of the study. They may be placed together or scattered throughout the survey, but they are geared toward eliciting specific desired information (Morris, 2006). For example, Glassner and Berg (1980, 1984) sought to

study drinking patterns in the Jewish community. Consequently, essential questions addressing this specific theme were sprinkled throughout the 144-structured-question survey instrument. For instance, among a series of questions about friends and people the family feels proud of, the following question was introduced: "Has anyone in the family ever thought anyone else drank too much?" Later during the interview, among general questions about ceremonial participation in the Jewish holiday of Passover, the interviewer systematically asked:

There is a question that we are a little curious about, because there seems to be some confusion on it. During the Passover story, there are seven or eight places it speaks about lifting a glass of wine. And there are three or four places which speak directly of drinking the wine. In some people's homes they drink a cup each time, and in some people's homes they count a sip as a cup. How is it done in your home?

Another regularly scheduled question asked during this segment of the interview is, "Another question that interests us is, what becomes of the cup of wine for Elijah [ceremonially poured for the Angel Elijah]?" Later, during a series of questions centering on Chanukkah observance styles, the interviewer asked: "What drinks are usually served during this time?"

Separating these essential questions, however, were numerous other essential questions addressing such other research concerns as ritual knowledge and involvement, religious organization membership, leisure activities, and so on. In addition, there were three other types of questions intended for other purposes.

Extra Questions *Extra questions* are those questions roughly equivalent to certain essential ones but worded slightly differently. These are included in order to check on the reliability of responses (through examination of consistency in response sets) or to measure the possible influence a change of wording might have.

Throw-Away Questions Frequently, you find throw-away questions toward the beginning of an interview schedule. *Throw-away questions* may be essential demographic questions or general questions used to develop rapport between interviewers and subjects. You may also find certain throw-away questions sprinkled throughout a survey to set the interviewing pace or to allow a change in focus in the interview. Throw-away questions, as the term implies, are incidental or unnecessary for gathering the important information being examined in the study. Nonetheless, these throw-away questions may be invaluable for drawing out a complete story from a respondent.

On occasion, throw-away questions may serve the additional purpose of cooling out the subject (Becker, 1963; Goffman, 1967). On these occasions, a throw-away question (or a series of them) may be tossed into an interview whenever subjects indicate to the interviewers that a sensitive area has been entered. The interviewer offhandedly says something to the effect of, "Oh, by the way, before we go any further, I forgot to ask you. . . ." By changing the line of questions, even for only a few moments, the interviewer moves away from the sensitive area and gives the interviewee a moment to cool out.

Probing Questions *Probing questions*, or simply *probes*, provide interviewers with a way to draw out more complete stories from subjects. Probes frequently ask subjects to elaborate on what they have already answered in response to a given question—for example, "Could you tell me more about that?" "How long did you have that?" "What happened next?" "Who else has ever said that about you?" or simply, "How come?" Along similar lines, Lofland and Lofland (1984, p. 56) write:

In interview[s] . . . the emphasis is on obtaining narratives or accounts in the person's own terms. You want the character and contour of such accounts to be set by the interviewees or informants. You might have a general idea of the kinds of things that will compose the account but still be interested in what the interviewees provide on their own and the terms in which they do it. As the informants speak, you should be attentive to what is mentioned and also to what is not mentioned but which you feel might be important. If something has been mentioned about which you want to know more, you can ask, "You mentioned _____; could you tell me more about that?" For things not mentioned, you might ask, "Did _____?" or "Was _____ a consequence?"

Often interviewers incorporate a structured series of probes triggered by one or another type of response to some essential question. Probes, then, are intended to be largely neutral. Their central purpose is to elicit more information about whatever the respondent has already said in response to a question.

Wording of Questions In order to acquire information while interviewing, researchers must word questions so that they will provide the necessary data. Thus, you must ask questions in such a manner as to motivate respondents to answer as completely and honestly as possible. As in the saying about computers, "garbage in, garbage out," so it is in interviewing. If the wrong questions are asked, or if questions are asked in a manner that inhibits or prevents a respondent from answering fully, the interview will not be

fruitful—garbage will come out. Denzin offers the following guidelines for formulating interview questions (Denzin, 1970, p. 129):

Questions should accurately convey meaning to the respondent; they should motivate him to become involved and to communicate clearly his attitudes and opinions; they should be clear enough so that the interviewer can easily convey meaning to the respondent; they should be precise enough to exactly convey what is expected of the respondent. . . ; any specific question should have as a goal the discerning of a response pattern that clearly fits the broad contents of the investigation. . . ; if questions raise the possibility of the respondent's lying or fabricating (which is always a possibility), care should be taken to include questions that catch him up, or reveal to him and the interviewer that his previous answers have been incorrect.

Communicating Effectively

Perhaps the most serious problem with asking questions is how to be certain the intentions of the questions have been adequately communicated. Researchers must always be sure they have clearly communicated to the subjects what they want to know. The interviewers' language must be understandable to the subject; ideally, interviews must be conducted at the level or language of the respondents.

Becker and Geer (1957, pp. 28–29) note the seriousness of knowing the language of the interviewee both in order to ask understandable questions and to interpret correctly what the interviewee says in response. They state:

Although we speak one language and share in many ways in one culture, we cannot assume that we understand precisely what another person, speaking as a member of such a group, means by any particular word. In interviewing members of groups other than our own, then, we are in somewhat the same position as the anthropologist who must learn a primitive language, with the important difference that, as Icheiser has put it, we often do not understand that we do not understand and are thus likely to make errors in interpreting what is said to us.

When developing surveys that will be applied to a large and diverse general population, many researchers choose what may be termed the *zero-order level of communications*. In such instances, the words and ideas conveyed by survey questions are simplified to the level of the least sophisticated of all potential respondents. Although this should tend to minimize potential communication problems with a range of respondents, it may also create some problems: The more sophisticated respondents may react negatively to questions asked in too simplistic a manner. When you are investigating a homogeneous subculture,

this problem becomes somewhat less critical. However, when interviewing a cross section of subjects on the same topic, you may need to consider varying levels of language.

Similarly, you must allow for special languages (both real and symbolic) that certain groups may use. For example, in the Glassner and Berg (1980, 1984) study, the interviewer needed to be moderately versed in Yiddish idioms in order both to conduct many of the interviews and to assist transcribers in accurately reproducing interview transcripts. In another instance, when Berg and Doerner (1987) conducted a study of volunteer police officers, the interviewer needed a general understanding of "cop speak," the jargonized symbolic language frequently used by police officers as illustrated earlier in this chapter.

It is important during the course of the interviews that the interviewer shares meanings for terms commonly held by members of the research population. This sometimes goes beyond mere language barriers. For example, in a study of Latino men who have sex with men (Berg et al., 2004) regarding risk factors associated with men who have sex with other men (MSM), one obstacle was that the subjects spoke Mexican street Spanish. Another was that within the MSM community, certain words and terms are used with specific connotations. To the average outsider, these terms hold one meaning, but to the MSM community member such terms hold a dramatically different meaning. It was important, therefore, that the researchers be versed in these special words and terms.

The last point is underscored by Murray (1991), who suggests that researchers must be aware of what he refers to as *language codes* in linguistics. These include various phrases used in Black English (sometimes referred to as Ebonics) and Chicano or Mexican street Spanish. If the interviewer is not knowledgeable about a group's special language use, various nuances of dialect may be lost during the interview.

A Few Common Problems in Question Formulation

Several other problems arise when constructing interview questions. Among the more serious ones are affectively worded questions, double-barreled questions, and overly complex questions.

Affectively Worded Questions

Affective words arouse in most people an emotional response that is usually negative. Although these questions may not be intended as antagonistic, they

nonetheless can close down or inhibit interview subjects (McGivern, 2006). For instance, the word *why*, in American culture, tends to produce in most people a negative response. One possible explanation has to do with the punitive connotation of this question, as in "Why did you do that wrong thing?" Consequently, when subjects mention some form of conduct or an attitude and are then asked by the interviewers, "Why?" they may not respond accurately or completely. On the other hand, if asked in response to these same statements, "How come?" they may offer complete responses in a relaxed manner.

Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin (1948) similarly found that when affective topics were considered, neutralizing the sense of the questions (reducing their affects) improved the likelihood of a full answer. They cite, as an example, asking subjects in a study of human sexuality, "Do you masturbate?" Virtually all the initial respondents answered immediately, "I never masturbate." Yet, when the question was reworded—"About how many times a week would you say you masturbate?"—suddenly many respondents were willing to offer responses. The second version of the question tends to neutralize or normalize the affect (sensitivity) of the question. Asking how often one masturbates implies that others do so as well, thereby reducing the affect of the word and concept *masturbate*.

The Double-Barreled Question

Among the more common problems that arise in constructing survey items is the double-barreled question. This type of question asks a subject to respond simultaneously to two issues in a single question. For instance, one might ask, "How many times have you smoked marijuana, or have you only tried cocaine?" It should be noticed that the two issues in this single question are slightly unrelated. In the first clause, the question asks the frequency of marijuana usage. The second clause confuses the issue and asks whether marijuana or cocaine has ever been used by the subject.

The logical solution to the double-barreled question, of course, is to separate the two issues and ask separate questions. Failure to separate the two issues may yield some answers, because people tend to be obliging during interviews and may answer almost anything they are asked, but analysis of a response to a double-barreled question is virtually impossible.

Complex Questions

The pattern of exchange that constitutes verbal communication in Western society involves more than listening. When one person is speaking, the other is

listening, anticipating, and planning how to respond. Consequently, when researchers ask a long, involved question, the subjects may not really hear the question in its entirety. Their response, then, may be only to some small portion of a greater concern woven into the complex question. Thus, keeping questions brief and concise allows clear responses and more effective analysis of the answers.

Pretesting the Schedule

Once researchers have developed the instrument and are satisfied with the general wording and sequencing of questions, they must pretest the schedule. Ideally, this involves at least two steps. First, the schedule should be critically examined by people familiar with the study's subject matter—technical experts, other researchers, or persons fitting the type to be studied. This first step facilitates the identification of poorly worded questions, questions with offensive or emotion-laden wording, or questions revealing the researchers' own biases, personal values, or blind spots.

The second step in pretesting before the instrument can be used in a real study involves several practice interviews to assess how effectively the interview will work and whether the type of information being sought will actually be obtained. Chadwick, Bahr, and Albrecht (1984, p. 120) suggest five questions for assessing an instrument:

1. Has the researcher included all of the questions necessary to test the research hypothesis?
2. Do the questions elicit the types of response that were anticipated?
3. Is the language of the research instrument meaningful to the respondents?
4. Are there other problems with the questions, such as double meaning or multiple issues embedded in a single question?
5. Finally, does the interview guide, as developed, help to motivate respondents to participate in the study?

A careful pretest of the instrument, although time consuming in itself, usually saves enormous time and cost in the long run.

Long Versus Short Interviews

Interviewing can be a very time-consuming, albeit valuable, data-gathering technique. It is also one that many uninitiated researchers do not fully understand. This is particularly true when considering the length of an interview.

Many quantitative researchers who dabble at interviewing are convinced that interviews must be short, direct, and businesslike. Some who use interviews over the telephone even recommend keeping them to no more than about five minutes (Hagan, 1995). As a result, one issue surrounding interviews is exactly how long or short they should be.

There are several ways to answer this question, but all will immediately direct your attention back to the basic research question(s). If potential answers to research questions can be obtained by asking only a few questions, then the interview may be quite brief. If, on the other hand, the research question(s) are involved or multilayered, it may require a hundred or more questions. Length also depends on the type of answers constructed between the interviewer and the subject. In some cases, where the conversation is flowing, a subject may provide rich, detailed, and lengthy answers to the question. In another situation, the subject may respond to the same question with a rather matter-of-fact, short, cryptic answer.

Obviously, the number of questions on the interview schedule is at least partially related to how long an interview is likely to take. On the average, an interview schedule with 165 questions is likely to take longer than one with only 50 questions. Yet, there are several misconceptions about long interviews that sometimes creep into research methods class lectures. For instance, some researchers believe that most subjects will refuse to engage in an interview once they know it may last for two or more hours. Others maintain that subjects may not remain interested during a long interview, and it will end in a withdrawal. Or, conversely, some researchers believe that short interviews do not provide any useful information. In fact, I am certain that such conditions do occasionally occur. However, they do not represent binding rules or even terribly viable guidelines.

Interviews, unlike written surveys, can be extremely rewarding and interesting situations for both the interviewer and the subject. Believing that subjects would quickly weary with a written survey containing 175 questions may be true. I for one believe such a situation is boring. However, talking with an interviewer about things that matter to the interviewee and doing so in a way that provides him or her with appropriate feedback, often provides subjects with a kind of intangible yet intrinsic reward. For subjects to comment after a long interview that they did not actually realize so much time had already passed is common. I will liken this to reading a good book. At some time or another, most of us have begun reading some exciting or engaging novel and not realized that hours had actually passed. So it is with a well-run long interview. Even after several hours, there is often a feeling that only minutes have passed.

Certain types of research lend themselves to longer interviews than others. For example, when one conducts a *life history*, the researcher is interested in the life events of those being interviewed (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). In this case, the

interview may go on for a very long time, perhaps carrying over to several separate sessions on different days. On the other hand, the interview may involve a single topic and require only a brief interview situation.

To suggest that all interviews must be lengthy if they are to yield useful information is not accurate. In 1989, Cal Larson and I conducted interviews in a maximum security prison among an assortment of inmates (Berg & Larson, 1989). Our research question involved an interest in the ways inmates perceived predetermined or fixed sentences—a flat length of time such as 5 years or 10 years—compared to their view of indeterminate sentences—a time range such as 5 to 10 years or 10 to 20 years. We were not interested in the family backgrounds or social experiences of inmates who committed particular categories of crime. Neither were we interested in determining explanations for why or how inmates committed their particular crimes or whether inmates had received deals or plea bargains, or any of an assortment of other interesting but unconnected issues. We simply wanted to know about their views of determinate and indeterminate sentences and a number of related questions. As a result, we focused directly on these issues, and the interviews lasted an average of about 45 minutes.

What we learned, however, was very interesting and important information. First, inmates reported they seldom think about getting caught when they commit a crime. As a result, the idea of a particular crime carrying a long fixed sentence did not offer any deterrence to their committing the crime (Berg & Larson, 1989). Second, several armed robbers indicated that if they did become concerned about lengthy fixed sentences, they would likely leave no witnesses, whereas their previous criminal style was to avoid harming bystanders. In short, we learned that fixed sentences might have the unintended effect of increasing the level of violence associated with some crimes.

You should understand that length is a relative concept when conducting interviews. Some topics and subjects will produce long interviews while others will create short ones. Furthermore, different styles of interviewing, such as interactive or interpretive orientations, that require the development of a *relationship* between researcher and subject, may last not only long durations but multiple sessions (Hertz, 1995; Kvale, 1996; Miller, 1996). What is important to remember is that simply because an interview contains many questions or only a few does not in itself immediately translate into a long or short interview.

Telephone Interviews

Related to the question of interview length is the role of telephone interviews in qualitative research. Telephone interviews are not a major way of collecting qualitative data. To be sure, telephone interviews lack face-to-face nonverbal

cues that researchers use to pace their interviews and to determine the direction to move in. Yet, researchers have found that, under certain circumstances, telephone interviews may provide not only an effective means for gathering data but also in some instances—owing to geographic locations—the only viable method. In fact, the primary reason that one might conduct a qualitative telephone interview is to reach a sample population that is in geographically diverse locations. For example, if an investigator is interested in studying how nursing home directors define elder abuse, he or she might consider conducting in-person interviews with some sample of nursing home directors. However, given that nursing home facilities may be at some distance from one another, as well as from the location of the interviewer, conducting interviews by telephone may be a logical resolution.

Qualitative telephone interviews are likely to be best when the researcher has fairly specific questions in mind (a formal or semistructured interview schedule). Qualitative interviews are also quite productive when they are conducted among people with whom the researcher has already conducted face-to-face interviews or with whom he or she may have developed a rapport during fieldwork (Rubin & Rubin, 1997). There are several important, necessary steps to accomplish a qualitative telephone interview. First, the investigator must establish legitimacy; next, the researcher must convince the potential subject that it is important for the subject to take part in the research; and finally, the researcher must carefully ensure that the information he or she obtains is sufficiently detailed to contribute meaningfully to the study.

This first step can be accomplished in several ways. For example, the interviewer might mail a letter to the prospective subject explaining the nature of the research and that the subject will be called to set an appointment for the actual interview. The letter should be on official letterhead and may contain supportive documentation (letters of support from relevant or significant people in the community, newspaper stories about the researcher or the study, etc.).

The second step will arise when the investigator initially contacts potential subjects and attempts to convince them to take part. This call will actually accomplish several things. It will allow the subjects to ask questions and raise any concerns they might have about the study or their participation. It will also provide an opportunity for the investigator to gain some sense of the individual and to begin developing a kind of relationship and rapport as well as an opportunity to convince the individual to participate in the study if the individual is resistant.

These calls should be made during normal working hours and researchers should *break the ice* by introducing themselves and ascertaining whether the individual has received the letter and accompanying materials. Calls should be made approximately 1 week to 10 days following the mailing of the letters of introduction. After the initial introduction, the researcher might ask if the individual has

any questions. Next, using a polite and friendly but firm affirmative statement, the researcher should ask, "When would it be convenient for me to call you back to conduct the interview?" Recognize that not all subjects will immediately agree to take part, and the researcher may need to do a little convincing. This may offer the additional benefit of forging a rapport with the subject.

Advantages of the Telephone Interview

Hagan (2006) outlines a series of advantages associated with undertaking telephone interviews. These include reduced staff requirements, a method by which the investigator can easily monitor ongoing interviews to assure quality and avoid interviewer bias, and the ability to reach widespread geographic areas at an economical cost. In addition, interviews can be recorded via an inexpensive patch between the telephone and the recording instrument. If a digital recorder is used, the interview can later be transcribed in the traditional fashion or downloaded into a computer and converted to text (which may need light editing) by a speech-to-text program (Halbert, 2003). Some researchers argue that telephone interviews and surveys, because they provide a kind of instant anonymity, are effective for obtaining hard-to-locate individuals or when asking highly sensitive questions (Champion, 2006; Hagan, 2006).

Disadvantages of the Telephone Interview

There are, of course, disadvantages to using telephone interviews, which for many researchers outweigh the potential advantages. For example, some people have no telephone, and others have unlisted numbers—both groups are effectively eliminated as potential interviewees. Also excluded from the subject pool are those who screen their calls through caller ID or an answering machine and avoid taking calls from researchers. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, an important disadvantage is that current telephone technology lacks the ability for the interviewer and interviewee to use full channels of communication. In other words, neither can read visual cues offered by the other (either those unintentional cues by the respondent or those intentionally transmitted by the interviewer).

Computer Assisted Interviewing

As pointed out in Chapter 1 of this book, among the fascinating changes occurring in the world of social research is the increased and innovative use of computer technology. Here, I discuss two major technological innovations

that impact interviewing. One is commonly referred to as *Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing* (CATI) and the other as *Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing* (CAPI). Both of these strategies have long been used in traditional survey research, but both also have potential qualitative applications.

Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI)

When conducting qualitative telephone interviews, CATI can be very useful. Earl Babbie (2004, p. 265) offers an excellent image of the basic process. He states:

Imagine an interviewer wearing a telephone headset, sitting in front of a computer terminal and its video screen. The central computer has been programmed to select a telephone number at random and dials it. (Random-digit dialing avoids the problem of unlisted telephone numbers.) On the video screen is an introduction ("Hello, my name is . . .") and the first question to be asked ("Could you tell me how many people live at this address?").

When the subject answers the telephone, the interviewer begins with an introduction, explains the purposes of the study, and invites the person to take part. Once the subject consents to participate, the interview begins. As the subject answers each question, the interviewer immediately types the response into the computer. In computer-assisted, *pencil-and-paper* surveys, the interviewer chiefly asks the questions, lists the possible answers, and then inputs the subject's responses.

In a qualitative version of CATI, the interviewer asks open-ended questions and types in the full accounts offered by the subject. The advantages to this version include skipping the need to later transcribe the data and allowing the information to be immediately input into a textual data manager (a computer program designed for qualitative textual analysis) or to be coded. Naturally, this requires an interviewer who is skilled in typing and is able to take the equivalent of dictation. However, because not all interviewers have this typing capacity and because it can become quite expensive to hire and train someone to do this, an investigator might opt to employ a system known as *Voice Capture*. This process has been extensively used in marketing research for over 10 years and involves digitally recording the voice of the subject during the course of the CATI (Tallal, 1998). Later, this recording can be transcribed, but during the course of the interview the subject is permitted to speak openly and freely with an added sense of anonymity, since the interviewer does not know what the subject looks like. Again, there is the obvious loss of visual cues because of the absence of face-to-face contact. This can be rectified with CAPI.

Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI)

Like CATI, CAPI employs a computer to provide the questions and capture the answers during an interview. In this case, the interviews are conducted face-to-face, thereby restoring the visual cues lost during a typical CATI-type interview. Again, the process can involve either the interviewer asking the questions and typing in the response (as with dictation) or with Voice Capture or similar type system to record the answers. There is also a second style of computer-assisted interviewing called *Computer Assisted Self-Administered Interviewing* (CASI). In this version of the process, the subject is provided with a computer (a laptop or access to a desktop computer) and allowed to read the interview schedule and type in his or her responses. Again, the advantages to this strategy include having the data ready to be placed into a data manager or coded, as well as offering the subject privacy while responding (there is no interviewer present while the subject types his or her answers).

The disadvantages, unfortunately, are numerous and include the fact that many people cannot type and will take a long time to hunt and peck at the keyboard. Some people may feel self-conscious about being poor spellers or writers and, thus, use only cryptic responses rather than fluid full accounts. Other subjects may be in a hurry and choose to either skip questions or write only very short answers. Some subjects may be weak readers or illiterate, further complicating the process. For this last category of subjects, some advances have been offered. Turner and his associates (1998), for example, have employed what they coined *Audio-CASI* (Audio Computer Assisted Self-Interview) as a strategy. This technique similarly employs a laptop computer with the questions on it and the ability of the subject to provide answers, but in addition this technique uses a headset and an audio version of the survey that is played for the subject to hear. Although Turner and colleagues (1998) used this technique with a survey-type questionnaire, the same process could be adapted for a more open-ended qualitative interview.

Web-Based In-Depth Interviews

As noted in this and the previous edition of *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, as technology advances, methods used in qualitative research must strive to keep up—or at least seek ways to take advantage of these technological advancements. As suggested, one way qualitative researchers can capitalize on the advancing computer age is through the use of a type of "digitized convergence" (Brown, 2002) by which investigators integrate or co-opt the more traditional survey-based procedures of CAPI and use them in a qualitative interview. Another method is to simply go online and use

the Internet as a research tool for conducting in-depth interviews. This can be accomplished either in synchronous (real-time) or asynchronous (not real-time) interview environments (Stromer-Galley, 2003).

Synchronous environments include real-time chat rooms, instant messenger protocols, and real-time threaded communications. Such environments provide the researcher and respondent an experience similar to face-to-face interaction insofar as they provide a mechanism for a back-and-forth exchange of questions and answers in what is almost real time. In some cases, "vid-cams" (computer-linked video cameras) can be used to allow the researcher and respondent to actually see one another.

While this type of interview interaction is not identical to a more traditional face-to-face interview, it does approach it in a number of ways. For example, when a respondent answers a question, the interviewer has the ability to ask probing questions to elicit additional information or to run in an entirely different direction, similar to the interviewer's ability in a face-to-face interview. Consequently, a researcher can delve as deeply as he or she chooses into an area either structured into the interview schedule or arising spontaneously in the course of the interview exchange.

Asynchronous environments include the use of e-mail, message boards, and privately hosted bulletin posting areas. Asynchronous environments are commonly used by investigators undertaking survey-based research (Bachman & Schutt, 2003; Champion, 2006). Bampton and Cowton (2002, p. 1) suggest that qualitative researchers can also take advantage of what they term the "e-interview." They describe the benefits of conducting e-mail-based qualitative interviews:

The asynchronicity of the e-interview has several consequences. There can be pauses in face-to-face interviews, of course, but in an e-interview the delay in interaction between researcher and subject can range from seconds (virtually real time) to hours or days. In our own research some of the replies came back surprisingly quickly, but the important thing is that the interviewee was not committed to replying promptly. In this lies one of the major benefits of the e-interview, in that busy subjects—and busy researchers, for that matter—do not have to identify a mutually convenient time to talk to each other. Nor do they each need to find a single chunk of time in which to complete the full interview, since as an interview—rather than something more akin to an e-mailed questionnaire—there should normally be more than one episode of question and answer. Indeed, such iterations are fundamental to the communication having the dialogic or conversational characteristics of a good interview.

For many people, the use of e-mail has become a common and comfortable activity. Transferring this comfort to the interview situation, then, can

similarly provide a benefit for qualitative interviewing (Stromer-Galley, 2003). Another advantage of the e-interview is that e-mail questions transmitted to an individual are effectively private: No one else online can add to, delete, or interrupt the exchange.²

Setting meeting times for interviews and conquering distance problems have long been problems when conducting qualitative interviews. E-mail interviews eliminate these issues by permitting subjects to answer in their own time and literally from across the country or even the world. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) also suggest that fatigue can be a problem in lengthy interviews, and this too is eliminated in the e-interview.

Asynchronous environments such as e-mail and bulletin boards naturally have drawbacks when it comes to conducting qualitative interviews. The obvious drawback is the loss of visual cues—both those that occur between interviewer and respondent as part of the conversational flow of the interview and those that serve as social markers in the interactionary process (e.g., age, gender, race, dress style). Also lacking is the spontaneity of probing and chasing down interesting topics that inadvertently arise in the course of the interview. Finally, interview subjects are limited to those who have access to both a computer and an e-mail account, as well as to those who are literate enough to express themselves in an e-mail format.

While I am not arguing that the e-interview should replace the face-to-face interview in all future research endeavors, it seems prudent to include this and other technological data-collecting strategies in the arsenal of lines of action for conducting qualitative research.

Conducting an Interview: A Natural or an Unnatural Communication?

Everyone actually has received some training and has experience in interviewing. Children, for example, commonly ask their mom or dad questions whenever they see or experience something different, unusual, or unknown. In school, students ask their teachers questions and respond to questions put to them by teachers. People regularly observe exchanges of questions and answers between teachers and other students, siblings and parents, employers and employees, and among friends. Thus, one might assume that since everyone has received tacit training in both asking questions (sending messages) and answering questions (receiving messages), the research interview is just another natural communication situation. But the research interview is not a natural communication exchange.

Beyond acquiring the ability to send and receive messages while growing up in society, people also learn how to avoid certain types of messages. Goffman (1967) has termed this sort of avoidance *evasion tactics*. Such tactics may involve a word, phrase, or gesture that expresses to another participant that no further discussion of a specific issue (or in a particular area) is desired. Conversely, people also usually acquire the ability to recognize these evasion tactics and, in a natural conversational exchange, to respect them. This sort of deference ceremony (Goffman, 1967, p. 77) expresses a kind of intrinsic respect for the other's avoidance rituals. In return, there is the unspoken expectation that this respect will be reciprocated in some later exchange.

As anyone who has ever conducted an interview already knows, this sort of deference ceremony simply cannot be permitted during the course of a research interview. In fact, a subject's evasion tactics during the course of an interview are among the most serious obstacles to overcome—but overcome them you must! At the same time, you do not want to jeopardize the evolving definition of the situation, the potential rapport with the subject, or the amount of falsification and gloss a subject may feel compelled to use during the interview. As Gorden (1987, p. 70) suggests, "If all respondents said nothing, responded with truth, or said 'I won't tell you!' the task of the interviewer would be much simpler. Unfortunately, the respondent can avoid appearing uncooperative by responding voluminously with irrelevancies or misinformation, and this presents a challenge to the interviewer." In other words, the interviewer must maneuver around a subject's avoidance rituals in a manner that neither overtly violates social norms associated with communication exchanges nor causes the subject to lie.

Qualitative interviews may appear to be similar to ordinary conversations in some ways, but they differ in terms of how intensely the researcher listens to pick up on key words, phrases, and ideas (Rubin & Rubin, 2004). They differ also in terms of the kinds of nonverbal cues that the investigator will watch for in order to effectively identify the interviewee's emotional state, deference ceremonies, and even lies. One way these obstacles can be handled is through use of the dramaturgical interview.

The Dramaturgical Interview

There are a number of necessary terms and elements connected with understanding the dramaturgical interview and learning how to maneuver around communication-avoidance rituals. Central to these is the differentiation between the *interviewer's role* and the *roles an interviewer may perform*. As De Santis (1980, p. 77) suggests, the interviewer may be seen as "playing an

occupational role," and "society can be expected to have some knowledge, accurate or inaccurate, about the norms which govern the role performance of various occupations." For instance, in our society, one might expect a farmer to wear jeans, not a fine three-piece suit, while working in the field. Similarly, one can expect certain things about appearance, manner, style, and language connected with other occupational roles, including that of an interviewer. For example, Maccoby and Maccoby (1968, p. 462) state:

What are some of the roles in which respondents may perceive an interviewer? Much depends, of course, on the auspices of the study and the setting of the interview. If the study has been sponsored by a prestigious institution and covers topics on which the interviewer might be assumed to have expert knowledge, the interviewer may find himself placed in a role similar to that of the family doctor; he is consulted for advice on the respondent's problems.

The implication of the preceding description of the role of an interviewer is that preconceived notions do exist among interviewees, but these notions are malleable. There can also be preconceived notions of subjects on the part of interviewers. Whether acknowledged or not, "There is always a model of the research subject lurking behind persons placed in the role of interview respondent" (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 7). In a study seeking to examine the isolation and vulnerability of elders, Cherry Russell (1999) found that her preconceived understandings of older people affected how she planned to research them, and this preconceived notion negatively affected the study. Because a subject's and an interviewer's preconceptions about one another may be based on both correct and incorrect information, the actual conception of the interviewer role rests on the definition of the situation established during the course of the interview itself.

In a number of sources on interviewing, the interviewer's role is discussed in terms of *biasing effects* or *reactivity* (Babbie, 2007; Chadwick et al., 1984). But the role of the interviewer is not necessarily established in granite, nor do the interviewer and interviewees operate within a vacuum! As Kahn and Cannell (1957, p. 62) suggest, "The role of the interviewer . . . is determined in part by the expectations of others." It is, therefore, within the capacity of an interviewer to affect (without biasing results) even the preconceived notions that subjects may have about the interviewer's role.

Many roles are available to an interviewer. Regardless of any preconceived notion and expectation about the interviewer's role as perceived by the interviewee, it is possible (within certain limits) for the interviewer to shape, alter, and even create desired role images. Gorden (1987, p. 213) describes this as *role-taking*. He explains that "role-taking is a conscious selection, from among one's actual role repertory, of the role thought most appropriate to display to a particular respondent at the moment."

As explained in the next section, by changing roles, the interviewer can also circumvent many of the avoidance tactics an interviewee might otherwise effectively use.

Interviewer Roles and Rapport

The model of the dramaturgical interview is intended to convey the notion of a very fluid and flexible format for conducting research interviews. With regard to rapport, which can be defined as the positive feelings that develop between the interviewer and the subject, it should not be understood as meaning there are no boundaries between the interviewer and the subject. The model of the dramaturgical interview should be interpreted as a conversation between two people conversing on one person's perceptions on the events of daily life, but, as Kvale (1996, pp. 5–6) similarly explains, “It is not a conversation between equal partners.” The dramaturgical interview should not be a dialogue, with more or less equal time allocated to each participant, because the whole point is to obtain information from the subject. In many ways, the ideal situation would be to assist the subject in conveying almost a monologue on the research topic. When this is not possible, the dramaturgical interview provides pathways to help the subject to offer his or her accounts.

To accomplish this, the interview must rely on the establishment and maintenance of good rapport. Just as no two people in society are exactly alike, no interviewer and his or her subject are exactly alike. However, if the interviewer is able to establish some sense of common ground, then one avenue of rapport building could be opened. For example, during the course of the Berg et al. (2004) study of risk factors associated with men who have sex with other men, one of the interviewers, Jose (a pseudonym), regularly made reference to the fact that he was a member of the MSM community. A second interviewer, Rosa, a heterosexual Latina, found common ground by referring to familiar Mexican cultural elements and events she and the subjects both understood. Similarly, in a study of Appalachian women and domestic violence, Patricia Gagne found common ground by alluding to her own experiences in an abusive relationship (Tewksbury & Gagne, 1997).

It is important to note that the interviewer does not necessarily always have to possess similar characteristics or experiences to that of the subjects—although some degree of understanding would certainly be a good thing to possess. In some situations, such as a study of the Ku Klux Klan, it would be unwise to send an African American in to conduct interviews. On the other hand, almost any Caucasian (who did not have significant ethnic facial characteristics) would likely work.

A number of feminist approaches to research in the social sciences seek in interviewing to emphasize the importance of building rapport with the respondents in order to achieve a successful interview outcome. Toward this end, some feminist researchers argue that interviewers must be willing to offer self-disclosures of personal information and develop genuine relationships with their interviewees beyond the boundaries of the roles of interviewer and interviewees (Cotterill, 1992; Oakly, 1981). This gives way to what may be referred to as a participatory model of interviewing (Lyons & Chipperfield, 2000). Participatory models of interviewing address the power differential between the researcher and the subject, thereby creating a nonhierarchical, nonmanipulative research relationship. Unfortunately, most interview situations, and notably the dramaturgical model, require the interviewer to maintain a certain amount of intentional control over the interview process—no matter how deferential, open, or self-disclosing he or she might choose to be during the course of the interview or when developing rapport.

Much of the literature of interviewing, especially in relation to the concepts of reactivity and rapport, suggests that the interviewee's conception of the interviewer centers around aspects of appearance and demeanor. Overt, observable characteristics such as race, gender, ethnicity, style of dress, age, hairstyle, manner of speech, and general demeanor provide information used by an interviewee to confirm or deny expectations about what an interviewer ought to be like. The negative reactive effects of an interviewer's observable social characteristics and personal attributes are extensively discussed in the literature on interviewing (see Burns & Grove, 1993; De Santis, 1980; Gorden, 1975, 1980, 1987; Nieswiadomy, 2002; Patton, 2002). In each source, however, the emphasis is on the effect an interviewer's characteristics have on obtaining the interviewee's consent to participate in an interview. Another theme emphasized in the literature is the potential bias arising from the effects of the interviewer's attributes.

There is little question that, as Stone (1962, p. 88) states, “Basic to the communication of the interview meaning is the problem of appearance and mood. Clothes often tell more about the person than his conversation.” Is it really sufficient merely to look the part? If a man dons an ermine cape and robe, places a gold crown on his head, attaches a perfectly sculpted crepe beard to his face, and regally struts about, is this a guarantee that he will perform *King Lear* in a convincing or even adequate fashion? To be sure, the interviewer's appearance, accreditation, sponsorship, and characteristics are important to interviewing (see, e.g., Benny, Riesman, & Star, 1956). All of these, of course, are within the absolute control of the interviewer. Attributes of appearance are in many ways analogous to the old door-to-door vacuum cleaner salesman's trick of placing a foot between the open door and its

jamb—a trick that neither ensured a sale nor prevented the injury of the salesman's foot as the door was slammed shut.

The Role of the Interviewee

It is important to keep in mind that throughout the interview process, there are two individuals involved: the interviewer and the interviewee. While this text and others spend considerable time discussing the role of the interviewer, little, if any, direct attention is given to the impression-management activities of the interviewee (Collins, Shattell, & Thomas, 2005). In our everyday conversations with others, it is common to consider how each party in the conversation seeks to present his or her best face, so to speak. But, it is less common to think about such impression management going on in the interview relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee (Dingwall, 1997).

Individuals who agree to take part in an interview usually have a complex set of reasons for doing so. Perhaps they expect to gain some sort of therapeutic benefit or are curious about the topic to be addressed. They may desire to share some personal experiences they have not felt comfortable sharing with others before, or their reason may be as mundane as a desire to spend time with someone because they are lonely. Each of these is an element, or facet, of the interviewee that he or she may want to either show or shield from the interviewer. Particularly because social scientists may be interviewing various deviants, criminals, abusers, or victims of abuse, the interviewee may desire to construct himself or herself in the most positive (or perhaps most negative) light possible in relation to the study topic (Rapley, 2001).

While interviewees often experience a kind of intangible gratuitous reward as a consequence of talking with a trained listener, they may also experience considerable apprehension about how the interviewer perceives them or the behaviors they are discussing (Collins et al., 2005; Thomas & Pollio, 2002). The solution, then, is for the interviewer to become somewhat more reflexive in his or her efforts throughout the interaction and to become a more *self-conscious performer* during the interview.

The Interviewer as a Self-Conscious Performer

The performance of the interviewer, as illustrated in the preceding anecdotes, is not at all haphazard. Actions, lines, roles, and routines must be carefully prepared and rehearsed in advance and, thus, constitute a *self-conscious performance*.

The literature on interviewing techniques often describes interviewers who react spontaneously to responses offered by interviewees in areas not

scheduled on the interview instrument. Interviewers are described as using their insight and intuition to formulate the next question or probe almost instinctively. However, even though following up subject areas initiated by interviewees is important (even when the areas may not have been seen as relevant during the interview's design stage), the notion that interviewers respond spontaneously is faulty. The use of terms such as *intuition* likewise seems loose and inaccurate.

Goode and Hatt (1952, p. 186) voiced a similar concern more than 50 years ago. They stated, "This is an unfortunate term [intuition] since for many it possesses overtones of vagueness, subjectivity and even mysticism."

Perhaps a more accurate understanding of the meaning of interviewer's intuition is what Archer (1980) calls *social interpretations*. The process of social interpretation, although not fully understood, is nonetheless evidenced by convincing empirical research (see Archer & Akert, 1977, 1980). Even when interviewers are presented with a unique response by an interviewee, it is highly unlikely that a similar (spontaneously created) action or statement is required from the interviewers. In the majority of interview situations, even novice interviewers will use some version of social interpretation and draw on a response taken from their repertoire of tactics (discussed in detail in a following section). Lincoln and Guba (1985) have similarly mentioned the effects of tacit knowledge with regard to nonverbal cues relevant to communications between senders and receivers—in other words, subtly and often implicitly learned pieces of knowledge that trigger associations between actions and meanings.

Holstein and Gubrium (1995, p. 7) indicate that interviewers often have some preconceived notion about their subjects:

If only tacitly, there is always a model of the research subject lurking behind persons placed in the role of interview respondent. Considering the epistemological activity of the interview requires us to ask how interviewers relate to respondents, as imagined subjects, and to the conversations they have with those subjects.

Social Interpretations and the Interviewer

Social interpretations are defined as the affected messages transferred from one acting individual to another through nonverbal channels. These nonverbal channels include body gestures, facial grimaces, signs, symbols, and even some phonemic sounds such as tongue clicks, grunts, sighs, and similar visible indicators of communication (e.g., physical proximity between participant actors, their blocking, and so forth). As Gorden (1987, p. 75) suggests, interviewers must hear not only *what* the subjects say but also *how* they say it.

Nonverbal channels include a variety of diverse elements. Each of these elements, taken individually, provides only a fragment of the information necessary for an accurate social interpretation. When rendered in combination, or as Archer and Akert (1980, p. 396) describe it, "in symphony," they provide sufficient cues and clues to convey clear messages and social meanings.

These nonverbal channels of communication, together with more obvious verbal channels, make up the conversational interaction situation or what has been called *full-channel communication*.

Social interpretations are not instinctive but learned and can be accurately made in a matter of seconds (Archer & Akert, 1977, 1980; Rosenfeld & Civikly, 1976; Rosenthal, Hall, Dimatteo, Rogers, & Archer, 1979). Social interpretations are formed by observing the complex presentation of clues in real-life situations, from filmed versions of these interactions or from still photographs in which even the nonverbal channels have been frozen in motionlessness as well as silence.

Throughout the interview process, the interviewer and the interviewee simultaneously send and receive messages on both nonverbal and verbal channels of communication. This exchange is in part a conscious social performance. Each participant is aware of the other's presence and intentionally says something and/or acts in certain ways for the other's benefit. However, to some extent, the interactions in an interview are also *unconscious*, which does not necessarily mean *unintended*. Unconscious behaviors should be understood as second-nature behaviors. An illustration of this sort of second-nature (automatic) interaction can often be observed when someone answers the telephone. The telephone voice is frequently almost melodic, even when only moments before the same voice may have been raised in angry shrieks directed toward a spouse or child. The social performance, of course, is for the benefit of whoever has just telephoned. Following the call, this individual's voice may again be raised in tones of anger—just as quickly and unconsciously.

Whenever interviewers realize they have trespassed on some unpleasant area of a respondent's life or an area the respondent does not want to talk about, it is not due to intuition or insight. This realization is derived from a social interpretation of the messages sent by the interviewee. The ways interviewers respond to these messages, however, will have a profound effect on the quality of the interview as a whole. For example, if interviewers ignore what they have interpreted as a very sensitive area and plunge ahead, they may force the respondent to lie, change the subject, not respond, or withdraw from the interview. If, on the other hand, interviewers do defer to the avoidance rituals used by the respondent, they may lose valuable information necessary to the study.

However, if an interviewer, in response to the clues, offers some demonstration that he or she has received the message and will at least, to some

extent, respect the interviewee's desires, the interview will probably continue. It is also likely that the interviewer will be able to direct the respondent back to this unpleasant area at a later point in the interview.

The use of social interpretations as described earlier certainly resembles Goffman's (1967) deference ceremony. There are, however, several critical distinctions, perhaps the most significant being that the deference is only temporary.

It has been suggested previously that throughout the performance, you as an interviewer must be conscious and reflective. You must carefully watch and interpret the performance of the subject. Your interpretations must be based on the cues, clues, and encoded messages offered by the interviewee. Included in the information these interactions supply may be the communication of a variety of moods, sentiments, role portrayals, and stylized routines, which represent the interviewee's script, line cues, blocking, and stage directions. You, the interviewer, then must play several other roles simultaneously with that of interviewer. You must participate as an actor but must serve as director and choreographer as well.

The Interviewer as Actor As an actor, you must perform your lines, routines, and movements appropriately. This means that in addition to reciting scripted lines (the interview questions), you must be aware of what the other actor (the interviewee) is doing throughout the interview. You must listen carefully to line cues in order to avoid stepping on the lines of the interviewee (interrupting before the subject has completely answered a question). In addition, as actor, you must remain nonjudgmental regardless of what the interviewee may say. If you want people to openly talk about their feelings and views, you must refrain from making any negative judgments—either verbally or through visual cues. The best way to accomplish this is to accept people for who and what they are; avoid making judgments of their actions, beliefs, or life styles, even in your mind.

The Interviewer as Director At the same time as you are performing as actor, you must also serve as director. In this capacity, you must be conscious of how you perform lines and move as well as of the interviewee's performance. As an interviewer, you must reflect on each segment of the interview as if you were outside the performance as an observer. From this vantage point, you must assess the adequacy of your performance (e.g., whether you are responding correctly to line cues from the interviewee and whether you are handling avoidance messages appropriately). This may include demonstrating both verbally and visually that you are empathic to things the interviewee has said. An approving nod or a brief comment, such as "I understand what you mean" or "I see," may offer sufficient positive reinforcement.

The Interviewer as Choreographer The various assessments made in the role of director involve a process similar to what Reik (1949) described as "listening with the third ear." By using what you have heard (in the broadest sense of this term) in a self-aware and reflective manner, you as interviewer manage to control the interview process. As a result, as choreographer, you can effectively block (choreograph) your own movements and gestures and script your own response lines.

From this dramaturgical perspective, you as interviewer do not respond to any communication, verbal or nonverbal, scheduled (on the interview) or initiated by the subject, by means of spontaneous intuition or innate insight. Instead, the entire interview performance is a self-conscious social performance. You and the interviewee are constantly in the process of performing and evaluating your own and each other's performance. Using these assessments, both participants are able to adjust scripts and movements in response to messages sent and received throughout the interview.

The Interviewer's Repertoire

Interviewers make adjustments throughout the interview consisting largely of switching from one role to another or altering their style of speech, manner, or set of lines. These devices comprise the interviewer's *repertoire*. Interviewers seldom genuinely improvise a spontaneous technique or strategy during the course of an actual interview. Certainly, a new technique would hardly be tried unless the repertoire of standard strategies has already been exhausted.

Preparation is a major guideline in interviewing. This is not to say that you should not actively pursue a topic initiated by the interviewee. However, even when interviewers pursue unplanned leads, they still can do it in a consistently scripted, rather than novel, fashion. At the very least, interviewers should be prepared with a series of scripted questions that may be triggered by virtually any possible topic area. These questions, very simply, include "Who with?" "Where?" "How come?" "How often?" "How many?" and a variety of similar questions relevant to the specifics of the study. In other words, during the design stages of the research, one must think about the possibility that unanticipated subject areas might arise. Consequently, even the unanticipated can be planned for!

For example, although one of the major foci in the Jewish drinking study conducted by Glassner and Berg (1980, 1984) was alcohol use, we were also interested in our subjects' possible involvement in other drugs. However, this interest was incidental, and we were thus only interested in drug use if the subjects raised the issue. For example, whenever a subject initiated a discussion

connected with marijuana use, regardless of where in the structured interview it occurred, the interviewer pursued the topic through use of a series of systematically scripted questions. Following the completion of the question series, the interviewer returned to the place in the interview schedule from which he had digressed. The use of a consistent and systematic line of questions for even unanticipated areas is particularly important for reliability and for possible replication of a study. This is especially true when interviewing from a dramaturgical perspective. Since interviewers as actors, directors, and choreographers may not be able to provide future researchers with detailed descriptions of the various character portrayals, routines, and devices they used during individual interview performances, it is crucial that, at least, a comparable script exists.

The idea of interviewers possessing a repertoire of prepared lines, routines, and communication devices sometimes conjures up the image of a little black bag of dirty tricks. It should not. As suggested earlier in this chapter, the research interview is not a natural communication interaction. When interviewing, it is necessary to remain in control of the interaction. Similarly, the interviewers' ability to move gracefully into and out of a variety of characterizations should not be seen as phony behavior. The characterizations are also components of the interviewers' repertoire, and they provide interviewers with the means of effectively conducting research interviews without violating social norms or injuring subjects.

An interviewer's ability to accurately read lines and cues offered by an interviewee and to play effectively to them is not some insincere ploy intended only to obtain desired information. Quite the contrary—if these were the only objectives, there would be no reason to vary roles and/or characters to adjust to the subject's responses. The various tactics and characterized roles used by dramaturgical interviewers allow interviewees to feel more comfortable. The performance is, thus, not a phony one. Zurcher (1983, p. 230) writes:

Why do we select a particular role for enactment? Why do we conform to some roles and modify or create others? What influences our choices or strategy for resolving role conflict or marginality? Why do we accept some identities and reject others? The circumstances of the social setting and the socialization process in which we find ourselves instrumentally affect the character of our role selections and enactments.

Extending Zurcher's (1983) notions on role enactments, one can see that in many situations, character projections present effective opportunities to develop or increase rapport. For example, one rapport-building tool that can be used before beginning an interview is *chatting* (Berg & Glassner, 1979; Douglas, 1985; Silverman, 2004). By briefly speaking with the subject on

non-study-related issues, such as the weather, sports, family, cars, television, the movies, and so forth, the interviewer develops rapport with the interviewee even before the interview has begun. It is an opportunity, also, for the interviewee to adjust his or her projection of self in an effort to be more comfortable with whatever impression he or she chooses to manage (Rapley, 2001).

As Goffman (1967) aptly states, the initial self-projection of the interviewers commits them to being what and who they purport to be. Thus, when interviewers identify themselves as such, namely, as research interviewers, they are committed to portraying a convincing characterization of this role. How they develop the character is variable and dependent on the other participant(s) in the interview performance.

As the interview unfolds from the initial encounter, various modifications, alterations, and adaptations used by the interviewer may be added to the initial projection of the interviewer's character. It is essential, of course, that these additions neither contradict nor ignore earlier character developments or the initial projection of self. Instead, these additions should be built on previous expressions of the interviewer's projected image.

For example, during the Glassner and Berg (1980, 1984) study, while arranging for initial interview appointments by telephone, I found it was important to amend my initial projection as simply an interviewer: I needed to express the fact that I was a *married* interviewer. I came to add this element intentionally to my character projection as a result of a number of line cues expressed to me by female potential interviewees. They usually asked what sex the interviewer was and then paused after learning that I was the interviewer. Many of these women then amended their character projections. Each explained that she would consent to the interview provided that her husband could be present. Picking up on this line cue, I originally went into a well-rehearsed series of lines on the confidential nature of the interview and my concern that she be comfortable to speak freely throughout the interview. I carefully added that her husband could certainly be present but would have to refrain from answering any questions I put to her, at least until she had completed her own answers. Although this tended to work effectively (these women did conditionally consent to the interview), it was a long and somewhat involved script.³

Almost by accident, I discovered I could easily indicate that I was married. I accomplished this by simply pausing in my conversation with female interviewee prospects and asking my wife a question (usually having to do with booking an interview date). In most cases, I would carefully attempt to have the telephone pick up my wife's voice when she answered. In some cases, however, I put the questions to my wife when she was not even at home, and the performance was nonetheless effective in altering my character projection.

Suddenly, I no longer posed any further threat to these female subjects (at least not on the basis of my possibly being an unmarried male).

My character amendment had not contradicted or ignored my original and initial role projection. I was still the interviewer, but I was now additionally known to be married. My performance did not trick the subjects into doing something they fundamentally did not want to do. Rather, the performance was a sincere attempt to reduce the potential interviewees' fears and anxieties—in short, to make them feel more comfortable with the idea of being interviewed.

Interviewers' Attitudes and Persuading a Subject

Attitudes toward the interview process strongly affect the quality of the resulting research. One interesting and fairly common assumption novice interviewers make is that subjects will not discuss certain topics with them. Interestingly, however, once subjects have been persuaded to participate in an interview, they often tell far more intimate details than the interviewers would ever want to know.

The problem actually involves helping novice interviewers get over the first few nervous moments when they attempt to persuade potential subjects to take part in the research. Naturally, if everybody always happily participated in research projects, there would be no problem for novice interviewers. Unfortunately, people often resist or are skeptical and need to be convinced.

When they meet this sort of resistance, novice interviewers are often panic-stricken. Nervousness is to be expected, especially if you are unprepared. On the other hand, countless interviewers have already encountered this situation and have developed a number of effective responses. Knowledge of these responses should both reassure novice interviewers and provide a means of persuading the majority of resistant individuals to take part in a research project.

Some individuals will not cooperate regardless of how persuasive one is or how they are approached. Backstrom and Hursh (1981) offer a variety of typical statements by skeptical potential subjects, along with sample responses. As they suggest, subjects tend to ask, "Why me and not someone else?" and insist, "I simply don't have the time." For example, a potential subject might ask, "Why [or how] was I picked?" The best answer is a simple and direct one: "You were chosen by chance according to a random selection procedure."

It is also sometimes necessary to convince subjects that what they have to say is important. For instance, a common response from a potential subject is, "Gee, I don't know too much about [whatever the subject is]; maybe you should interview someone else." Again, simplicity is the key: "It isn't what

you know about [whatever the subject is], just what you think about it. I'm interested in your opinions."

If potential respondents insist that they simply have no time, researchers may be faced with a somewhat more difficult problem. Several strategies may be necessary. First, depending on the actual length of time required for the interview, interviewers may volunteer to conduct it during late evening hours (if that is convenient for the subject). Or they may suggest conducting the interview in several segments, even during lunch breaks at the work site, if that is possible. Frequently, if interviewers simply indicate that they realize time is an important commodity and they really appreciate the sacrifice the potential subject will be making, some accommodation will be made. In the Glassner and Berg (1980, 1984) study, for example, interviews were conducted at the homes of individuals or in their offices and periodically began as late as 11:30 at night or as early as 5:30 in the morning. In other words, it is important to be flexible.

Developing an Interviewer Repertoire

One final question that naturally arises is how neophyte interviewers develop their repertoires. People do not usually wake up one morning and suddenly decide that they are going to run out and conduct research using interviews to collect data! People also do not become expert interviewers immediately after reading books on interviewing. Interviewing requires practice. Whether first attempts at conducting interviews are called pilots, role-playing, pretests, practice interviews, mock interviews, or any other euphemism, they all mean interviews. Certainly, reading about how to interview, particularly ethnographic accounts, offers neophyte interviewers some necessary strategies and tactics. However, without actually conducting interviews, students cannot manage to develop appropriate repertoires.

Perhaps the most effective way to learn how to interview is by role-playing with more experienced interviewers. Although many sources on interviewing recommend role-play, few specify that at least one participant should be experienced. To have two inexperienced interviewers role-play with each other seems analogous to having two plumbers teach each other neurosurgery. It is particularly fruitless, furthermore, to have neophyte interviewers assume the role of interviewees. Although it would be impossible for even the most experienced interviewer to characterize all the different kinds of individuals and sorts of responses neophytes will encounter in the field, it is, however, far less likely that neophytes could perform the role of interviewee adequately. It is, however, possible for experienced interviewers to draw on their actual past performances and to develop composite characterizations of

different interviewee types. By working with these projected characterizations in the process of a mock interview, neophytes are afforded an opportunity to acquire various lines and routines necessary for maintaining control over the entire interview performance.

Techniques to Get New Researchers Started

Sometimes, during the course of an interview, you will notice that the interviewee answers only in single-word responses or in very short statements. In order to create more complete and detailed interviews (to literally draw out the depth), interviewers must use various strategies and devices from their repertoire. In an effort to give new interviewers a few techniques to start their repertoire, I will address the uncomfortable silence, echoing, and letting people talk.

Uncomfortable Silence The technique of uncomfortable silence involves consciously creating a long, silent pause after asking the interviewee a question, even if the interviewee offers only a word or a cryptic response. Indeed, Kvale (1996) also points to the possible utility of silence as a strategic device to enhance data collection. Specifically, he suggests that interviewers employ silence to further the interview in a manner analogous to that used by therapists. "By allowing pauses in the conversation the subjects have ample time to associate and reflect and then break the silence themselves with appropriate information" (Kvale, 1996, pp. 134–135).

In normal conversational interactions, particularly in Western society, people have a difficult time with silence while talking with someone. The natural reaction when such a silence continues for a prolonged period is for interviewees to say something. In some cases, they will repeat their brief answer. In other cases, they will provide additional and amplifying information. In still other situations, they will state, "I have nothing else to say," or some similar comment. Rarely, however, will they simply sit silently for too long. I recommend that this period of silence extend only for a maximum of 45 seconds. Try to count slowly to yourself ("one, Mississippi, two Mississippi," and so forth) while offering the interviewee good eye contact.

Echoing There is a tendency in interviewing to try and communicate that you understand what the interviewee is talking about. Some sources will even recommend that the interviewer periodically state "I know what you mean," or "that happened to me too," (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 100). I will argue that this can be disastrous, especially for a new interviewer, because it is unlikely that a novice will make a short statement and leave it at

that. The greater probability will be (and to a large extent the more natural conversational response) the interviewer will discuss in detail his or her similar experience, shifting the focus from the interviewee to the interviewer. This does not effectively convey that the interviewer is paying attention to the interviewee. Instead, it says, "Listen to me. I have something more important to say than you do."

However, it is important to convey the idea that you as interviewer are hearing what is being said and that you are genuinely listening and understand. This can be accomplished through echoing what the interviewee has just said. For example, consider the following exchange.

Jack: When I first tried using marijuana, I felt really scared. I was, like, really out of control. I was all alone and I really didn't like how it felt.

Interviewer: That must have been a scary feeling.

Jack: Yeah, I was not really interested in trying marijuana again too soon. At least, I wasn't going to do it alone. I figured it would be better with a group of friends.

Although the interviewer has added nothing new to the exchange, he or she has conveyed that he or she was listening. In turn, the interviewee is encouraged to continue.

Letting People Talk From a dramaturgical perspective, this actually means the interviewer must not *step on the interviewee's lines*. In other words, avoid unintentional interruptions. People speak at different paces and with varying breathing and pausing rates. Just because a subject has made a one-sentence statement and paused does not mean he or she may not intend to continue with eight or ten more sentences. The interviewer must assess the way a subject tends to answer questions and adjust his or her own pace and desire to ask probing questions. Inexperienced interviewers frequently cut off their interviewees simply because they are anxious to get through their schedule of questions. This can be a serious mistake that will radically reduce the quality of the resulting interview. The answer is: *Let people talk!* Better to be a little slow at first with your questions than to constantly cut off interviewees by stepping on their lines.

Taking the Show on the Road

After neophyte interviewers have become novices and have developed their repertoire, they are ready to play their role before an audience. Just as a musical show seldom opens on Broadway until it has played in smaller cities such as

Boston or New Haven, novice interviewers should also not run immediately into the field. Broadway productions take the show on the road in order to obtain feedback from critics and audiences. In a similar manner, novice interviewers must try out their performances in front of an audience of competent critics, who may include experienced interviewers or the kinds of people they may be interviewing for a given study.

This sort of going on the road should allow interviewers to polish their performances. The most effective way to accomplish this is a dress rehearsal—that is, conducting an interview as if it were the real thing. This will also provide the novice with an opportunity to try out various strategies for drawing out fuller and more complete details. Following this dress-rehearsal period, novice interviewers should be ready to enter the field.

The Ten Commandments of Interviewing

Borrowing an idea from Salkind (2008), I have constructed the following 10 points or 10 commandments of interviewing. I believe they nicely summarize the basic rules for conducting a decent interview. Better interviews will result only from practice and interviewer's self-development.

1. *Never begin an interview cold.* Remember to spend several minutes chatting and making small talk with the subject. If you are in the subject's home, use what's there for this chatting. Look around the room and ask about such things as photographs, banners, books, and so forth. The idea here is to set the subject at ease and establish a warm and comfortable rapport.
2. *Remember your purpose.* You are conducting an interview in order to obtain information. Try to keep the subject on track, and if you are working with an interview schedule, always have a copy of it in front of you—even though you should have your questions memorized.
3. *Present a natural front.* Even though your questions are memorized, you should be able to ask each one as if it had just popped into your head. Be relaxed, affirmative, and as natural as you can.
4. *Demonstrate aware hearing.* Be sure to offer the subjects appropriate nonverbal responses. If they describe something funny, smile. If they tell you something sad, look sad. If they say that something upset them, try to console them. Do not present yourself as uninterested or unaware.
5. *Think about appearance.* Be sure you have dressed appropriately for both the setting and the kind of subject you are working with. Generally, business attire is most appropriate. If you are interviewing children,

a more casual appearance may be more effective. Remember to think about how you look to other people.

6. *Interview in a comfortable place.* Be sure that the location of the interview is somewhere the subject feels comfortable. If the subject is fearful about being overheard or being seen, your interview may be over before it ever starts.
7. *Don't be satisfied with monosyllabic answers.* Be aware when subjects begin giving yes-and-no answers. Answers like these will not offer much information during analysis. When this does occur, be sure to probe with questions such as, "Can you tell me a little bit more about that?" or "What else happened?" Even a simple pause and an *uncomfortable silence* might yield additional information.
8. *Be respectful.* Be sure the subject feels that he or she is an integral part of your research and that any answer offered is absolutely wonderful. Often subjects will say things like, "You don't really want to know how I feel about that." Assure them that you really do!
9. *Practice, practice, and practice some more.* The only way to actually become proficient at interviewing is to interview. Although this book and other manuals can offer guidelines, it is up to you as a researcher to develop your own repertoire of actions. The best way to accomplish this task is to go out and do interviews.
10. *Be cordial and appreciative.* Remember to thank the subject when you finish and answer any questions he or she might have about the research. Remember, you are always a research emissary. Other researchers may someday want to interview this subject or gain access to the setting you were in. If you mess things up through inappropriate actions, you may close the door for future researchers.

Know Your Audience

If you have ever attended the live performance of a pretty good comedian, you may have noticed that he or she seemed to know the audience. The comedian seemed to know how much *blue material* the audience wanted and would tolerate. He or she even may have used local names of people or places in the routine. In fact, in the case of really good comedians, they may even have incorporated certain local *insider* jokes during the course of the routine. All of these things were because the comedian had taken the time to prepare and get to know the audience.

When interviewing, it is likewise advisable to *know your audience*. In this case, however, it means understanding the group or groups from which you

draw your subjects. During the past several years, I have worked with a number of Asian and Middle Eastern graduate students. They are a constant reminder to me that it is very important to understand the culture of your research subjects. Often the kinds of questions that we in the West take for granted create significant cultural dilemmas for certain groups.

For instance, one of my graduate students was developing a dissertation project to examine delinquency in Taiwan. The student, who was Chinese, began developing questions from information he found in the literature.

Among the original questions we discussed was what seemed to be a fairly innocuous one: "About how often do you date?" The student explained that he could not ask Chinese adolescents this question. I was a bit surprised, being somewhat ignorant about Chinese culture. He went on to explain that proper Chinese adolescents do not date as we Westerners think about dating. In other words, an adolescent boy and girl would never go off on their own to the movies, or roller skating, or any other *traditional date*. In fact, such an activity would be viewed by most proper adults as indecent, since dating tends to have sexual connotations in Taiwan. Furthermore, it would be impolite to ask adolescents such a question. He also explained that this did not mean that Taiwanese adolescents did not have their own form of dating. This variation in dating might be called *group dating*. In this form, five or six male friends will meet five or six girls at a skating rink—not so much by chance as by design. Once there the groups tend to pair off, but they would never describe *this as a date*.

The solution to this problem was to craft a question that asked whether the youths ever intentionally went to certain locations with friends of the same gender to meet with groups of friends of the opposite gender.

In another situation, one of my students from Jordan was interested in examining issues of delinquency among a population of incarcerated Jordanian youths. His study population included both male and female delinquents. Among the questions commonly asked, according to the literature he reviewed, pertained to sexual activity. He came to me quite upset. He explained that under Islamic law he simply could not discuss sexual activity with young girls. Not only would it be improper for him and embarrassing to the girls, but it also might actually force these girls to lie if they were, in fact, sexually active. Ironically, we circumvented this problem by asking these girls about dating practices.

These examples suggest a very important issue that must not be underplayed. This issue is understanding the culture of the subjects you work with. It is of critical importance that when you develop interview schedules the language as well as the nature of the questions remain inoffensive. In the ever-shrinking electronic world we currently live in, it is becoming more and more possible to conduct comparative research projects. As a result, many researchers

are dealing with a wide variety of different and literally foreign cultures. It is critical, then, that you carefully plan out the types of questions you want to ask and the types of individuals you use to conduct interviews in these situations. In short, know your audience before your performance!

Curtain Calls

In concluding this section on learning the ropes of dramaturgical interviewing, it is important to note that some individuals may never achieve the status of highly skilled interviewer. However, just as there are B-movie actors who make their entire careers by acting in dozens of low-budget films and never achieve stardom, so too can there be effective B-movie interviewers. Put simply, some individuals will be able to obtain sufficient information from an interview to conduct viable research, yet will always remain awkward or clumsy in their performance.

Other individuals will completely fail to conduct interviews successfully. These individuals fail to become even B-level interviewers not because of interpersonal limitations but because of their failure to achieve a self-aware performance. These individuals are unable to adapt their scripts and blocking in order to accommodate the interviewee while continuing to maintain effective control over the interview process.

Analyzing Data Obtained from the Dramaturgical Interview

When novice interviewers have mastered to some extent interviewing strategies and practices and have conducted a number of interviews, the next problem is how to organize all the data accumulated in the interviews. How should the interviewers proceed with the task of taking many hours of tape-recorded interviews, for example, and analyzing them? Janice Morse (1994, p. 23) observes that despite the proliferation of qualitative research methodology texts, the process of data analysis remains fairly poorly described.

Although analysis is without question the most difficult aspect of any qualitative research project, it is also the most creative. Because of the creative component, it is impossible to establish a complete step-by-step operational procedure that will consistently result in qualitative analysis. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative analysis does not lend itself to this sort of certainty. One cannot pull out numbers (operationally reduce responses) from the interviews and expect to plug them into a qualitative analysis computer program—none exists! For these reasons, the following points are intended more as recommendations, tips, and hints on how to organize interview data rather

than as a specific, rigid guide. Although some of the suggestions may suit certain projects nicely, the analysis of data is primarily determined by the nature of the project and the various contingencies built in during the design stages.

It is important to note that while qualitative analysis is sometimes thought to lack the precision assumed to be present in quantitative research, this is not necessarily the case. Good qualitative research, like good quantitative research, is based on calculated strategies and methodological rigor. Insights obtained from qualitative research can not only add texture to an analysis but also demonstrate meanings and understandings about problems and phenomena that would otherwise be unidentified. Qualitative analysis cannot be undertaken quickly, neatly, or lightly, but this should never be viewed as a liability or limitation. Instead, this characteristic of qualitative analysis is perhaps its greatest strength. When qualitative analysis is undertaken, certain priorities must be established, assumptions made during the design and data-collection phases must be clarified, and a particular research course must be set. Quantitative data are sometimes incorrectly leaf raked (particularly by computer programs) in order to find results, but qualitative analysis cannot be conducted in this manner.

From an interactionist position, interviews are essentially symbolic interactions. From the dramaturgical interview's perspective, these interactions can be described along the lines of performances. The social context of the interview, therefore, is intrinsic to understanding the data that were collected (Silverman, 1993, 2004).

Beginning an Analysis

Analysis of interview data cannot be completely straightforward or cut and dry, but it is still necessary to understand what to do when you reach this phase in the research. The most obvious way to analyze interview data is *content analysis*. Although you may certainly abstract reducible items from interview data in order to quantify them, your analysis immediately ceases to be qualitative. A comprehensive consideration of content analysis is the subject of Chapter 11. This section outlines how to organize and prepare for analyzing the data collected from depth interviews. In order to analyze data, you must first arrange them in some ordered fashion. In the next section, some suggestions about ordering data are offered.

Systematic Filing Systems

As Lofland and Lofland (1984) suggest, "First, and perhaps foremost is the establishment of some kind of filing system." By *filing*, Lofland and Lofland literally mean a physical (mechanical) means of maintaining and indexing

coded data and sorting data into coded classifications. Files may involve placing material into boxes, file cabinets, or envelopes, or even on floppy disks. The obvious purpose of a filing system is to develop a means by which to access various aspects of the data easily, flexibly, and efficiently. Of course, the central issue is what should be filed. In Chapter 11, a related and comprehensive examination of what Strauss (1987) calls *open coding* is offered. In this chapter, however, it is assumed that each interview was recorded on tape and transcribed verbatim and is ready for a thorough reading and annotating of codable topics, themes, and issues.

To begin, you simply seek naturally occurring classes of things, persons, and events, and important characteristics of these items. In other words, you look for similarities and dissimilarities—patterns—in the data. But you must look for these patterns systematically!

Typically, a systematic indexing process begins as researchers set up several sheets of paper with major topics of interest listed separately. Below these major interest topics are usually several other subtopics or themes. For example, Glassner and Berg (1980) began analysis with 16 separate major thematic topic sheets, each containing from 2 to 13 minor topics or subthemes (Berg, 1983, p. 24). A total of 80 specific subthemes were consistently sought, coded, and annotated on interview transcripts.

Ideally, this process should be accomplished by two or more researchers/coders, independently reading and coding each of several transcripts. This process is intended to establish the various topics to be indexed in the filing system. Using two or more independent coders ensures that naturally arising categories are used rather than those a particular researcher might hope to locate—regardless of whether the categories really exist. The consequence of this process, if correctly executed, is a precise, reliable, and reproducible coding system.

These *index sheets* should contain some type of code identifying the transcript in which it has been located, the page number of the specific transcript, and a brief verbatim excerpt (no more than a sentence). Traditionally, codes used to identify transcripts are pseudonyms or case numbers (randomly assigned). A typical index sheet might look something like the one in Table 4.1.

As implied in the preceding example, every subtheme is annotated from each transcript. When more than one subtheme is mentioned in the same passage, it is nonetheless shown under each subtheme (see the entries for #6 under the headings *Beer* and *Wine*). Cross-referencing in this fashion, although extremely time consuming during the coding stage, permits much easier location of particular items during the later stages of analysis.

When every interview transcript has been read and index sheets have been appropriately annotated, researchers should have a comprehensive means for

Table 4.1 Alcohol Use [Major Topic/Theme]

Subthemes		
<i>Beer</i>	<i>Wine</i>	<i>Hard Liquors</i>
#12, pp. 3–6: I only drink beer when I am with my. . . .	#6, pp. 2–4: I love the taste of wine, but I hate beer.	#7, pp. 22–25: When I'm feeling real up, I'll have a drink.
#6, pp. 2–4: (see wine)	#5, p. 8: I only drink wine during the ceremonies, you know, the religious ceremonies.	#5, p. 23: I almost never drink liquor, just that one I told you about.
#9, pp. 3–4: Whenever I am really warm, like in the summer, I'll have a beer.		

accessing information. Additionally, the index sheets provide a means for counting certain types of responses in order to suggest magnitudes in response sets or for beginning content analysis of various specific themes.

Short-Answer Sheets

In addition to developing a comprehensive filing and indexing system, researchers may want to create a *quick response* or short-answer sheet to include in their files. Particularly when conducting standardized interviews, it is possible to complete brief responses for each of the questions asked as you read through and code each transcript. In essence, the questions become the interview schedule, and coders simply write short responses for each. Frequently this can be accomplished by reducing many of the responses to either affirmative (yes), negative (no), no clear response (unclear), or a very brief excerpt (no more than one sentence) including page reference.

Short-answer sheets are included primarily for convenience. They can be stored in separate files or with each interview transcript. They summarize many of the issues and topics contained in each transcript (e.g., a respondent's income, age, gender, occupation, and so forth). Since answers for which more detail was provided have been captured and coded in the indexing sheet procedure, these short-answer sheets offer another type of cross-reference summary.

Analysis Procedures: A Concluding Remark

Stacy (1969) suggests that the collection of qualitative data is often so extensive that researchers can feel that their jobs must be complete when they have

gathered it all in. This conclusion, of course, is far from accurate. As they listen to the interviewees, researchers frequently develop many interesting (and sometimes unreliable) impressions about possible patterns. After the interviews are completed, however, researchers must closely examine potential patterns to see what findings actually emerge directly from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). Such grounded findings, emerging from the data themselves, are frequently among the most interesting and important results obtained during research, even though they may have gone unnoticed during the data-collecting phase. Procedures used to identify these grounded concepts and patterns are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 11.

TRYING IT OUT

Naturally, a certain amount of mental effort is required to learn the skills necessary for conducting effective interviews. These mental juices may have been flowing as you read this chapter on interviewing. But, as previously mentioned, there is no substitute for practice. You will have to go out and conduct several interviews. There are many public places where you can practice interviewing. Consider, for example, conducting several unstructured interviews with people at your local public library, on a busy downtown street corner, or even while feeding pigeons in a public park.

You might also consider creating a brief semistructured instrument (either individually or as a class) on some timely issue. These instruments can then be used as practice schedules during interviews either among classmates or in public places. Some possible topics include how the threat of AIDS may have affected dating practices, whether all workers should be subject to urine analysis as a condition of employment, or whether elementary and secondary school teachers should be required to pass competency examinations as conditions of their retention in schools. Or, simply select a topic from the headlines of the local newspaper. Remember, your purpose is to practice interviewing skills, not to derive actual scientific empirical research.

Good interviewers work on improving their listening skills. The better an interviewer hears what is being said by the subject, the more effectively he or she can play the interviewer role. Classrooms are excellent places to practice aware hearing techniques. In our culture, we have a tendency to interrupt speakers in order to interject our own views or comments. It is, in fact, quite difficult for novice interviewers to learn that they cannot say such things as, "Oh yeah, I did that once," or "Gee, that's really something, but have you ever tried . . .," or similar interruptions. Remember, when interviewing, the ideal is to have the subject speaking 80 to 90 percent of the time. When interviewers take up too much of the conversation, little research information is gained.

It is likewise important to demonstrate to the subject that you are really listening—*aware listening*, as it may be called. This means you are not thinking about your next question or about how smart you can make yourself look with some comment—the usual style of natural conversational exchange.

Try the following in order to practice aware listening skills: The instructor pairs off all the students in the class. Each pair is positioned so that their seats are facing each other, but not too close together. The teacher arbitrarily assigns a listener and a speaker in each pair. Now the teacher asks each speaker to talk for 30 seconds on some mundane topic—for example, "my favorite color," "my favorite food," or "the best day in my life." The instructor times this exercise and, after 30 seconds have elapsed, calls out "Stop!" At this point, the *listener* repeats verbatim everything he or she heard. This includes using first person singular ("I" statements) if the original speaker used them.

Following this, the participants reverse roles. The original speaker becomes the listener and vice versa. The teacher again times a 30-second mundane-topic exchange. After this is complete, the time is increased to 60 seconds, and the teacher suggests a slightly more personal topic, such as "the most embarrassing thing that ever happened to me," "something I really like about myself," "something I would change about myself if I could," or "something I dislike about myself."

It is important to be sure you do not make any verbal statements, responses, or comments when in the role of the listener. You may make non-verbal gestures, such as a nod or use of eyes or eyebrows, to show appropriate response to statements.

When you have completed the exchanges, consider the following questions:

1. Did your body language change during the exchanges? For example, did you move closer or further apart? Did you cross or uncross your legs or arms?
2. Did the level of sound change at all when you went from the mundane question to the more revealing personal one?
3. Was there less (if any) giggling and movement during the more self-revealing questions as compared with the mundane questions?
4. Was it difficult to sit silently and concentrate on listening?

NOTES

1. Few accounts of the interviewing process directly make use of a dramaturgical mode. One notable exception is Douglas (1985), who uses dramaturgy to describe creative interviewing. Another exception is Denzin (1973, 1978), who applies several dramaturgical elements to his description of the interview situation. However, traditional descriptions of the interviewing process ignore, or at most, make rudimentary use of the

notion of role-playing. The description of role-playing itself is usually isolated from the actual interviewing process and appears under such headings as "training interviewers" or "piloting surveys" (Benny & Hughes, 1956; Bingham & Moore, 1959; Denzin, 1970, 1973, 1978; Kahn & Cannell, 1957; Smith, 1975). Occasionally, more knowledgeable authors correctly identify Moreno (1977) as a major contributor to the development of role-playing as a means of training researchers and therapists. Yet, these same sources fail to recognize the benefit of role-playing and other dramaturgical elements beyond the interviewer-training stage.

2. Slight risk does exist, of course, should these e-mails be transmitted via a wireless network. A well-versed hacker could conceivably hijack the entire communication. The likelihood of this occurring is rather small, and encrypting wireless transmissions would even further reduce the risk.

3. Few of the women actually had their husbands sit through any portion of the interview. In most cases, it seemed sufficient for their husbands to look over the interviewer and be present in the house.

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