Using interviews as Qualitative Research Methods

“Do you have five minutes to talk about taking from the rich to give to the poor?”

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Today

• Presentation
  – Why use interviews and research rigour
  – Interview design
  – Conducting interviews
  – Analysing and writing up interview data

• Exercises
  – Interview techniques
  – Coding interview data
About me...

About you...
Why use interviews?

• Investigate complex behaviour
• Gains access to information about events, opinions and experiences.
• Own opinions and tentative conclusions can be checked, verified and scrutinised
Interviewing and research rigour

• Sample size: n=1
• Importance of rigour
  – Coherence of approach-topic-interview
  – Sampling
  – Preparation
  – Subjectivity and inter-subjectivity
  – Critical reflexivity

“Look, could you come to our next research-and-development meeting and tell them just what you’ve told me?”
Theoretical Frameworks

• Ethnographic methods
  – Interview, fieldnotes, participant observation
  – Thick description
• Phenomenological method
  – Study of phenomenon from the perspective of the informant
  – Lived experiences
• Feminist methodology
  – Aims to capture women’s lived experiences in a respectful manner that legitimates women’s voices as the sources of knowledge.
  – Critique of positivist science—claims of objectivity hide power structures that marginalise the experiences of the less powerful.
Structured-------------Unstructured
Interview Design

• Interview schedules and Interview guides
• Start with a literature review and archival research
• Formulating good interview questions
• Use easily understood language that is appropriate to your informant.
  – Use non-offensive language.
  – Use words with commonly and uniformly accepted meanings.
  – Avoid ambiguity
  – Phrase each question carefully
  – Avoid leading questions as much as possible
  – Try to use open-ended questions
• Starts with east to answer questions—get people talking.
  – eg duties, responsibilities, involvement in an issue.
• Then move to abstract questions, then sensitive issues.
• TEST YOUR QUESTIONS ON SOMEONE.
• Begin with demographic information (age, where living, job, family, etc).
Interview Design—Types of Questions

Primary Questions

• Descriptive—Details on events, places, people and experiences.
• Storytelling—Identifies a series of players, an ordering of events, or causative links.
• Opinion—Impressions, feelings, assertions, and guesses.
• Structural—Taps into people ideology and assumptions.
• Contrast—Comparison of experience by place, time, gender, and so forth.
• Devil’s advocate—controversial/sensitive issues broached without associating the researcher with people who are not prepared to make their opinions public.

Secondary Questions

• Clarification—used when an answer is vague or incomplete.
• Nudging—Used to continue a line of conversation.
• Summary—Outlines in-progress findings for verification.
• Receptive cues—can be verbal or non-verbal, encourages an informant to continue speaking.
HAVE A LOOK AT THE HANDOUT...
Structured Interview

• Everybody asked the same questions in the same order.
• Uses an interview schedule that typically comprises a list of carefully worded and ordered questions
Semi-structured interviews

• Still employs interview schedule or guide
• Researcher does not have to strictly adhere to the schedule.
• Role of the researcher more intervening than unstructured.
Unstructured interviews—oral histories

• Oral history, life history, some types of group interviewing and in-depth interviewing.
• Focusses on personal perceptions and histories
• Informant focussed
• Preliminary meeting—is it going to work?
• Multiple interviews
• Importance of open questions
• Interviews are structured—orientation, common, specific questions
• Technical issues
• Preservation of data
Problem questions

- When do you get to the bus stop and what do you do while you wait?
- Double barrel
Problem questions

• How do you think verticalisation has affected your food supply?

• Jargon.
Exercise—do your own interview...

- Topic: **Places for writing and research.**
- Devise an interview schedule (3 questions).
- Share it with a group of 4 and choose the best 3 questions based on the information in the Dunne reading and discussion in the group.
Ethics and Interviewing

- Confidentiality
  - Protecting privacy
  - Anonymity
- Informed consent
  - What do you intend to do with the research?
  - What is in the interview?
- Risk of harm
  - Physical or social
  - Economic
- Reciprocity
  - How are you giving back your research?
Developing the interview questions for the Breathing Spaces project

HANDOUT
Steps to getting a good interview

The goal: rapport
Steps to getting a good interview

1. Contact
   - Choose your informants well
   - Negotiate permission
     - Do you need consent?
   - Introduction and establish credentials
   - State how you found out about the informant
   - Outline why you want to conduct an interview
   - Indicate how long the interview will take
   - Run through the letter
Steps to getting a good interview

2. Interview relationship
   - Professional vs Creative or empathetic interviewing
   - The importance of small talk
   - Accept hospitality
   - Be an active listener
Steps to getting a good interview

3. Closing the interview
   – Don’t just leave.
   – State what happens next
   – Make sure you say thanks for the informants time AND that you value their insights and experiences
   – Good last questions
Recording the interview

- Audio recording vs notetaking
- Audio recording
  - Most complete record
- Transcribing the data
  - Do it that night!
  - How to transcribe
- Participant checking
- Fieldnotes
- Personal log and analytical log
Exercise—do your own interview...

• Test the questions you devised earlier on one person from another group.
Analysing Interview Data

• Coding: a process of identifying and organising themes in qualitative data.
• Descriptive coding—manifest content analysis
• Analytic coding—latent content analysis
• Start with:
  – List of what you think are most important themes
  – Conditions, interactions, strategies and tactics and
  – Descriptive, analytic from literature review.
• Start coding—review after approx. 10%
  – Themes need to be split or are discarded or amalgamated.
Getting started with coding

• Conditions
  – geographical context (social and physical), life situation, circumstances.

• Interactions among actors:
  – encounters, conflicts, accords, other types of interactions.

• Strategies and tactics
  – requires a deeper understand of the things you observe and how they relate to broader phenomena.
  – How strategies link to broader social, economic or political processes.

• Consequences
  – also more complicated.
  – Look for words (due to, as a result of).
  – Results of actions over time. Can be large, or subtle and personal.
The Breathing Spaces Project

- Background
- Idea and funding
- Approaching people
- Developing coding ideas
  - Exercise: You will be given an interview on the Dawesville Foreshore with an informant responding to questions about why she values the space.
  - Write down a list of themes that you think will be relevant to your coding. Make sure that you number them.
  - Check your list against the list of the person next to you.
Exercise: Dawesville Foreshore
Exercise: Dawesville Foreshore
Exercise: Dawesville Foreshore
Exercise 2: Coding the interview

• Read through the transcript provided.
• Apply your coding framework.
• Remember:
  – Coding can overlap.
  – Go quickly then reflect on your categories.
• Develop new themes as you go along
• You have 15 minutes.
Software for qualitative analysis

NVIVO DEMONSTRATION