

Handbook of
**INTERVIEW
RESEARCH**

Context & Method

Editors

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A SAGE Reference Title
 **Sage Publications**
International Educational and Professional Publisher
Thousand Oaks ■ London ■ New Delhi

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For information:



Sage Publications, Inc.
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320
E-mail: order@sagepub.com

Sage Publications Ltd.
6 Bonhill Street
London EC2A 4PU
United Kingdom

Sage Publications India Pvt. Ltd.
M-32 Market
Greater Kailash I
New Delhi 110 048 India

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Handbook of interview research: Context & method / [edited] by Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and indexes.

ISBN 0-7619-1951-1 (cloth: acid-free paper)

1. Interviewing-Handbooks, manuals, etc. I. Gubrium, Jaber F.

II. Holstein, James A.

H61.28 .H36 2001

158'.39—dc21

00-013201

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

01 02 03 04 05 06 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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POSTMODERN TRENDS IN INTERVIEWING

◆ Andrea Fontana

Postmodernism has changed our society, the way in which we conceive of it, and the way we see ourselves and relate to others. Whether we consider postmodernism a radical break from modernism or merely modernism's continuation, profound changes have occurred (see Best and Kellner 1991; Dickens and Fontana 1994). We are no longer awed by metatheories about the nature of society and the self (Lyotard 1984), theories that we now question and deconstruct. Today, we focus on smaller parcels of knowledge; we study society in its fragments, in its daily details (Silverman 1997). Postmodernism has affected many fields, from architecture to literary criticism, from anthropology to sociology. It has provided few answers but raised more questions, rendering the reality of the world extremely problematic. Postmodernism also has changed the very nature of experience. The everyday world and the world of media have been merged (Baudrillard 1983), and as the boundaries

between the two have collapsed, experience is mediated by the "hyperreality" of the likes of Disneyland, *Real TV*, and *The Jerry Springer Show*, where the imaginary becomes real and the real imaginary (see Denzin, Chapter 40, this volume).

Influenced by postmodern epistemologies, interviewing also has changed; ours has become "the interview society" (Silverman 1993; Atkinson and Silverman 1997). Interviewing is no longer reserved for social researchers or investigative reporters, but has become the very stuff of life as members of society spend much of their time asking questions, being asked questions themselves, or watching TV shows about people being asked questions and answering them in turn. They all seem to have routine knowledge of the rules of interviewing, with no need for instruction.

In this chapter, I discuss postmodern trends in interviewing. I begin by outlining some of the postmodern sensibilities that are relevant to interviewing. Although

there is no such a thing as postmodern interviewing per se, postmodern epistemologies have profoundly influenced our understanding of the interview process, so that approaches increasingly take on a postmodern cast. Perhaps it is appropriate, then, given that postmodernism advocates the blurring and fragmentation of theories and methods, that I can present only fragments of postmodern-informed interviewing rather than an overarching, modernistic formulation of "the" postmodern interview.¹

◆ *Postmodernism and Its Influence*

Postmodernism, which is not a unified system of beliefs, has been presented and interpreted in a diversity of ways. It can be seen as a crisis of representation in a great variety of fields, from the arts to the sciences, and more generally in society at large (Dickens and Fontana 1994). It has been conceptualized both as the continuation of modernism and as a break from it. In some views, postmodernism advocates abandoning overarching paradigms and theoretical and methodological metasystems (Lyotard 1984). Postmodernism questions traditional assumptions and deconstructs them (Derrida 1972); that is, it shows the ambiguity and contextuality of meaning. It proposes that, in the name of grand theorizing, we have suppressed this ambiguity in favor of a single interpretation, which is commonly touted as "the truth," rather than a choice among many possible truths. Postmodernism orients to theorizing and, indeed, to society itself, not as a monolithic structure but as a series of fragments in continuous flux. It persuades us to turn our attention to these fragments, to the minute events of everyday life, seeking to understand them in their own right rather than gloss over differences and patch them together into paradigmatic wholes (Silverman 1997).

POSTMODERN SENSIBILITIES AND INTERVIEWING

Postmodern sensibilities have greatly affected the methodologies used by social scientists. Researchers influenced by a postmodern agenda have come to display a greatly heightened sensitivity to problems and concerns that previously had been glossed over or scantily addressed. These can be briefly described as follows:

- ◆ The boundaries between, and respective roles, of interviewer and interviewee have become blurred as the traditional relationship between the two is no longer seen as natural (see Ellis and Berger, Chapter 41, this volume).
- ◆ New forms of communication in interviewing are being used, as interviewer and respondent(s) collaborate together in constructing their narratives.
- ◆ Interviewers have become more concerned about issues of representation, seriously engaging questions such as, Whose story are we telling and for what purpose?
- ◆ The authority of the researcher qua interviewer but also qua writer comes under scrutiny (see Briggs, Chapter 44, this volume). Respondents are no longer seen as faceless numbers whose opinions we process completely on our own terms. Consequently, there is increasing concern with the respondent's own understanding as he or she frames and represents an "opinion."
- ◆ Traditional patriarchal relations in interviewing are being criticized, and ways to make formerly unarticulated voices audible are now center stage.
- ◆ The forms used to report findings have been hugely expanded. As boundaries separating disciplines collapse, modes of expression from literature, poetry, and

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drama are being applied (see in this volume Ellis and Berger, Chapter 41; Richardson, Chapter 42; Rosenblatt, Chapter 43).

- ◆ The topic of inquiry—interviewing—has expanded to encompass the cinematic and the televisual. Electronic media are increasingly accepted as a resource in interviews, with growing use of e-mail, Internet chat rooms, and other electronic modes of communication (see in this volume Mann and Stewart, Chapter 29; Denzin, Chapter 40).

These sensibilities, some of which are now old and some new, provide a context for methodological exploration. Let us consider, initially, how these have informed and affected traditional interview roles. Note, especially, that some ostensibly postmodern trends have been close to the heart of qualitative inquiry for decades (see in this volume Warren, Chapter 4; Johnson, Chapter 5).

◆ *From Traditional to Postmodern-Informed Interviewing*

Traditional, structured interviewing establishes a priori categories and then asks pre-established questions aimed at capturing precise data that can be categorized, codified, and generalized (see Singleton and Straits, Chapter 3, this volume). The aim is to provide explanations about the social world. The method assumes that there is a set of discreet facts to be apprehended in the social world and that we can garner them through the use of rigorous techniques. The language of science permeates these techniques. The interviewer is not unlike a highly trained instrument and remains substantively detached from the situation and the respondent. Responses are quantifiable and allow generalizations

about society. Ideally, respondents can be viewed as “rational beings” in that they understand all possible choices presented to them and answer as comprehensively and truthfully as possible.

CRITIQUES OF THE DETACHED INTERVIEWER

Some critics claim that the method of traditional interviewing is much more like science fiction than science, a perspective that has not been lost on qualitative researchers. Herbert Blumer (1969), for one, prefaces the introduction of his book *Symbolic Interactionism* with an insightful critique of traditional methodologies. The seminal work of Aaron Cicourel also is a milestone in unveiling the myth of “scientific” interviewing. Cicourel (1964) refers to the hidden complexity of the interview situation:

All social research includes an unknown number of implicit decisions which are not mirrored in the measurement procedures used. The abstraction process required to describe a set of properties, regardless of the measurement system, automatically imposes some amount of reification. (P. 80)

Discussing and quoting the work of Herbert Hyman and other survey researchers, Cicourel adds, “The authors are not aware that too much stress has been placed on asking questions and recording answers, and that the interviewer is overlooking . . . the many judgments *he made* in the process” (p. 91). Cicourel goes on to suggest that the interview is an interactional event based on reciprocal stocks of knowledge, a point I shall take up again in discussing phenomenological influences on postmodern trends.

The response of interactionist sociologists to problems inherent in structured interviewing was to move interviewers center stage as constructive agents and acknowl-

edge their influence on interview outcomes. They also recognized the importance of feelings on the part of both the interviewer and the respondent, as well as the possibility of deceit in the interview situation. Jack Douglas (1985), in his book *Creative Interviewing*, advocates lengthy, unstructured interviews in which the interviewer uses his or her *personal* skills by adapting to the changing interactional situation of the interview. For Douglas, the creativity is cultivated by the interviewer, who attempts inventively to reach a mutual understanding and intimacy of feelings with the interviewee. Still, it has been pointed out that the interviewee remains a rather passive participant even in this context. Jaber Gubrium and James Holstein (1997; Holstein and Gubrium 1995) consider Douglas's interviewing techniques decidedly "romantic." As they explain, "Douglas imagines his subject, like the image implicit in survey research, to be a repository of answers, but in his case, the subject is a well guarded vessel of feelings not simply a collection of attitudes and opinions" (Gubrium and Holstein 1997:65).

EMERGING VOICES OF INTERVIEWEES

In the 1980s, new trends appeared in qualitative sociology, in both ethnography and interviewing, as researchers attempted to secure the constructive voices of research subjects. Some were concerned with the authorial voice of the researcher speaking for his or her subjects (Van Maanen 1988; Geertz 1988); others took a broader epistemological approach (Marcus and Fischer 1986).

George Marcus and Michael Fischer (1986) gave widely appreciated special attention to these issues. Marcus and Fischer were concerned with the authority of traditional ethnographic texts, commonly derived through a combination of ethnographic work and in-depth interviews. They also addressed problems of represen-

tation and selectivity generated by the privileged position of the researcher both as a field-worker and as an author. Marcus and Fischer felt that in "modernistic" interviewing, the researcher is in control of the narrative and highlights what best conveys, in his or her judgment, the social worlds of those being studied (see the discussion of "representational rights" in Briggs, Chapter 44, this volume).

Marcus and Fischer present postmodern alternatives in anthropology that allow diverse voices to come through. Some of these alternatives apply to interviewing as well as to ethnography. One is the need to take a "dialogic" approach, in which the focus is "on the dialogue between anthropologist and informant as a way of exposing how ethnographic knowledge develops" (Marcus and Fischer 1986:69). An exemplar of this work is Kevin Dwyer's (1982) *Moroccan Dialogues*, in which the interviews are only minimally edited and show the problematic nature of interviewing for all participants. Another is the use of "polyphony," which is "the registering of different points of views in multiple voices" (Marcus and Fischer 1986:71). The aim here is to reduce the editorial authority of the researcher. Another alternative is found in Vincent Crapanzano's (1980) ethnography *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan*, where the author presents transcripts from interviews and minimizes his interpretation of them, inviting the reader to help in the process of interpretation. This is rendered more difficult by the informant, Tuhami, who uses complex metaphors in his communication with the researcher, mixing real events with fantasy, both of which Crapanzano takes as valid data.

In sociological work we find similar trends. Susan Krieger (1983) focuses on polyphony by presenting the various perspectives of respondents, highlighting discrepancies and problems rather than minimizing them. Allen Shelton (1995), in a study of victimization, social process, and resistance, uses the machine and other powerful metaphors to convey his message.

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He mixes sociological data with stories from his past, using visual imagery from paintings to underscore his points. In another context, Shelton (1996) even goes back to the vespers to compellingly embellish his sociological findings.

Norman Denzin's work is a major impetus for applying postmodern sensibilities to research methodology (see Denzin, Chapter 40, this volume). Denzin (1989) focuses on "the meanings persons give to themselves and their life projects" (pp. 14-15). Key elements of the approach are the essentially *interpretive* nature of fieldwork and interviewing and the attempt to let the members *speak for themselves*. In particular, Denzin borrows the concept of epiphanies from James Joyce and orients to these as turning points that reshape people's lives, which, in turn, have significant implications for the selection of interview topics. By focusing on these existential moments, Denzin believes, we can gain access to the otherwise hidden feelings experienced by individuals and bring them to the fore for others to appreciate.

Denzin (1997) continues his dialogue with postmodernism in more recent work, but becomes more distinctly partisan. Here, again, he begins with Joyce and the concern for meaning as perceived by the members of society. However, he is no longer happy with just trying to understand and make these meanings visible. He has become more politically involved with his research subjects. He rejects the traditional canons of researcher noninvolvement and objectivity, and instead advocates "partnership" between researcher and subjects. He is especially partial to subjects' "underdog" status: "This model seeks to produce narratives that ennoble human experiences while facilitating civic transformation in the public (and private) spheres" (p. 277).

In summary, one path from traditional to postmodern-informed interviewing is that the so-called detached researcher and interviewer are recast as active agents in the interview process and attempts are made to deprive their agency. Another path is

that the interviewee's agency is privileged and, in the name of the interviewee, all manner of experimentation is undertaken to make evident his or her own sense of identity and representational practices. I turn now to the influences of various theoretical perspectives on this trend; following that, I will consider how this has affected representational practices for interview material.

◆ *Phenomenologically Informed Interviews*

Phenomenological sociology first appeared in the 1960s, loosely based on the philosophy of Edmund Husserl and the writings of the social philosopher Alfred Schutz. It is in Cicourel's (1964) work that we see the tie between phenomenology and interviewing most clearly, even as in Harold Garfinkel's (1967) own project there is an added phenomenological influence through ethnomethodology.

Cicourel argues forcefully early on that the interview, no matter how technically perfected its execution, is grounded in the world of commonsense thinking (see Schaeffer and Maynard, Chapter 28, this volume). In fact, according to Cicourel, it must be so, for without the participants' ability to share common or overlapping social worlds and their related communicative understanding, the interview would not be possible. Cicourel follows in Schutz's (1962, 1964, 1966) footsteps here. Schutz discusses the way that members of society share a common stock of knowledge that allows them to understand and reciprocate actions. This extends to markedly mundane and shared knowledge, such as speaking in the same language, knowing that the sun will set, that peanut butter will stick to the roof of your mouth, that the Chicago Cubs will never win the World Series, and that Pamela Anderson's beauty is surgically enhanced.

Years later, following postmodern trends, Irving Seidman resurrects Schutz's sentiments in his book *Interviewing as Qualitative Research* (1991). Seidman explains that by establishing an "I-thou" relationship or reciprocity of perspectives, the interviewee (I) and the interviewer (thou) form a personal relationship. The result is that the interviewee is no longer objectified but becomes a comember of a communicative partnership. In fact, in some instances, this may blossom into a full "we" relationship, according to Seidman (for an example, see Denzin's 1997 model of "collaboration").

Robert Dingwall (1997) seems to be rediscovering these sentiments when he states:

If the interview is a social encounter, then, logically, it must be analyzed in the same way as any other social encounter. The products of an interview are the outcome of a socially situated activity where the responses are passed through the role-playing and impression management of both the interviewer and the respondent. (P. 56)

Dingwall adds elements of Goffman's dramaturgical view to the basic notions, which he attributes to both Mead and Schutz. Both within and outside of the interview, action is mediated by others' responses and their co-contingent dramatic realizations. According to Dingwall, individuals in interviews provide organizing accounts; that is, they turn the helter-skelter, fragmented process of everyday life into coherent explanations, thus cocreating a situationally cohesive sense of reality.

ETHNOMETHODOLOGICAL IMPULSES

Ethnomethodologists put forward similar sentiments. They share a skeptical approach to standardized methodologies. Garfinkel (1967), for one, informs us that

we cannot study social interaction except in relation to the interactive methods employed by social actors themselves to create and maintain their sense of reality. As such, the impulse in interview research would be to attend as much to *how* participants assemble their respective communications as to *what* is asked and answered (Boden and Zimmerman 1991; Maynard et al. 2001).

Recently, Holstein and Gubrium (1995) have directly linked ethnomethodology with these distinctive questions in their discussion of the "active interview." They specifically apply to interviewing the perspective that the interview is a social production between interviewer and respondent. In other words, it entails collaborative construction between two *active* parties. Because the interview is situationally and contextually produced, it is itself a site for knowledge production, rather than simply a neutral conduit for experiential knowledge, as traditionally believed.

Holstein and Gubrium are further inspired by the ethnomethodological distinction between *topics* (substantive elements of inquiry) and *resources* (procedures used to study the topics) (see Zimmerman and Pollner 1970). They point out that, in interviews, researchers focus too much on the *whats*, or substantive foreground, and tend to gloss over the *hows*, which "refer to the interactional, narrative procedures of knowledge production, not merely to interview techniques" (p. 4). Indeed, given the irremediably collaborative and constructed nature of the interview, a postmodern sentiment would behoove us to pay more attention to the *hows*, that is, to try to understand the biographical, contextual, historical, and institutional elements that are brought to the interview and used by both parties. The interview should be understood in light all of these elements, rather than as a discreet, neutral set of questions and ensuing responses, detached from both the interviewer's and the respondent's constructive and culturally informed agency.

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Gubrium and Holstein (1998) continue this line of thinking in a discussion of personal narratives. Their point of departure is the argument that life comes to us in the form of stories, and personal narratives are approached as individualized constructions. In conveying life to us, respondents tell us stories about themselves, but they do not do so in a social vacuum (see Atkinson, Chapter 6, this volume). Rather, as Gubrium and Holstein explain, "personal accounts are built up from experience and actively cast in the terms of preferred vocabularies" (p. 164; compare Garfinkel 1967). A postmodern trend emphasizing social construction is evident in their goal: "We want to make visible the way narrative activities play out in everyday practice to both produce coherence and reveal difference" (p. 165).

Others share similar perspectives. The late Madan Sarup (1996), in analyzing the role of narrative in the construction of identity, distinguishes two parts to each narrative: "The story is the 'what' of the narrative, the discourse is the 'how'" (p. 170). And more: "When we talk about our identity and our life-story, we include some things and exclude others, we stress some things and subordinate others" (p. 16). Although Sarup's focus is identity, the message is much the same—the story (and its identities) is constructed in its communicative unfolding.

Dingwall (1997) takes this impulse further. Following Garfinkel, he states that interviews are "an occasion for the elicitation of *accounts*" and that "accounting is how we build a stable order in social encounters and in society" (pp. 56, 57). Applying this to interviews, Dingwall concludes: "An interview is a point at which order is deliberately put under stress. It is a situation in which respondents are required to demonstrate their competence in the role in which the interview casts them" (p. 58). Once more, we are directed to the collaborative production of contextually based accounts.

♦ *Feminist Influences*

In analyzing the images of a nude man with his arm raised in greeting and a nude woman imprinted on the *Pioneer* spacecraft, Craig Owens (1983) states: "For in this (Lacanian) image, chosen to represent the inhabitants of Earth for the extraterrestrial Other, it is the man who speaks, who represents mankind. The woman is only represented; she is (as always) already spoken for" (p. 61). It has been much the same in the methodological world of interviewing; women have always already been spoken for in the very structure of the traditional interview. This is exemplified in Earl Babbie's (1992) classic text on research, which has nothing to say about gender differences in interviewing. Indeed, as Carol Warren (1988) reports, female researchers in primitive patriarchal societies were, at times, temporarily "promoted" to the role of male in order to be allowed to witness events and ceremonies from which women were traditionally excluded (see Ryen, Chapter 17, this volume).

Not any longer. One of the significant influences on the postmodern trends in interviewing comes from feminist quarters (see Hertz 1997). An ongoing concern has been the elastic subject position of the respondent. A leading question here, for example, is, Do women always speak as women, or are other important subject positions part of their response repertoires? If feminists have focused on gender differences, they have not ignored other important factors, such as race.² For instance, Kim Marie Vaz (1997) has edited an interdisciplinary book about African and African American women to "unearth" their experiences by telling personal portraits, focusing on how both their gender and their race have affected them. Patricia Hill Collins (1990) uses interviews as well as autobiographical accounts, songs, images, and fiction to bring out the viewpoints of

black women. Her interviews are hardly "detached," as they are shaped to provide a sympathetic context for making visible the experiences of being both black and women.

Kath Weston (1998) explores another traditionally silenced subjectivity, sexual nonconformity. As she recounts, "Back in graduate school, when I first decided to study lesbians and gay men in the United States, the faculty members who mentored me pronounced the project 'academic suicide'" (p. 190). Weston persevered nevertheless and, in her book *Long Slow Burn* (1998) she rejects the idea that sexuality is merely a sociological specialization; rather, she considers sexuality as being at the often silent heart of the social sciences, deeply implicating the subject. We infer from this that the interview that realizes alternative sexualities can serve to reveal the sexual contours of all subject positions (see Kong, Mahoney, and Plummer, Chapter 12, this volume).

Contrary to the traditional belief that the relation between interviewer and interviewee is neutral and the results of the interview can be treated as independent of the interview process as long as the interviewer is methodologically skilled, gender-consciousness changes the nature of interview results (Denzin 1989). Seidman (1991) shares this view:

All the problems that one can associate with sexist gender relationships can be played out in an interview. Males interviewing females can be overbearing. Women interviewing men can sometimes be reluctant to control the focus of the interview. Male participants can be too easily dismissive of female interviewers. (P. 78)

If we are to overcome these and other potential problems, the traditional relationship between interviewer and interviewee must change, according to many feminists. The two must become equal

partners in a negotiated dialogue. The woman/interviewee should be allowed to express herself freely. Rather than saying or implying, "Answer my question, but don't tell me anything else," interviewers should indeed encourage all respondents to express their feelings, their fears, and their doubts. As Kathryn Anderson and Dana Jack (1991) explain, "If we want to know what women feel about their lives, then we have to allow them to talk about their feelings as well as their activities" (p. 15).

Hertz (1997) urges us to blur the distinction between the interviewer and the respondent. As the interviewer comes to realize that she is an active participant in the interview, she must become reflexive, acknowledge who she is in the interview, what she brings it, and how the interview gets negotiated and constructed in the process. Doing so will alleviate an associated reification of methodological problems. But we need to go beyond methodology, as Hertz points out, to face the ethical problems associated with how much we are willing to become partners and disclose about ourselves (also see Behar 1996). As we turn the interviewee from a faceless member of a category to a person, how much should we divulge about her? How do we maintain her anonymity? Ruth Behar (1996) poses the matter succinctly: "Are there limits—of respect, piety, pathos—that should not be crossed, even to leave a record? But if you can't stop the horror, shouldn't you at least document it?" (p. 2).

A related ethical problem stems from researchers' traditional custom of using interviewees to gather material for their own purposes. As Daphne Patai (1987) explains, no matter how well-intentioned researchers are, if they use interview materials exclusively for their own purposes, they are exploiting the women they interview (Oakley 1981; Reinharz 1992; Smith 1987). As a result, some interviewers take the notion of partnership one step further and become advocates for those they interview (Gluck 1991); others turn interview

narratives into political acts as they uncover the injustices to which those studies are subjected (Denzin 1999a).

◆ *Virtual Interviewing*

For traditional interviewing, the transition to the Internet would seem flawless, moving from telephone questionnaires to the use of e-mail, chat rooms, and Web sites. In one way or another, all of these remain "distant" interviewing, with little or no face-to-face contact. If only about 50 percent of American households have personal computers and about half of these have access to the Internet (Fontana and Frey 2000), new software programs facilitate electronic interviewing and provide the ability to obtain returns of almost 100 percent from some specialized groups (Schaefer and Dillman 1998). At the same time, new ethical problems are surfacing, because anonymity is not feasible in e-mail communication, although in chat rooms the use of pseudonyms is possible (see Mann and Stewart, Chapter 29, this volume).

The move to electronic interviewing is perhaps most problematic for in-depth interviewing. Rather than the parties to the interview being face-to-face, interaction centers on "virtual" respondents and "virtual" interviewers, to which we might add the "virtual" researcher, all of whose empirical groundings are unclear. Indeed, the lack of clarity portends a version of Baudrillard's (1983) "hyperreality," the melding together of everyday and media realities, confounding the traditional boundaries of text, identity, and other.

To explore some of these issues on-line, Annette Markham (1998) created an Internet site where she interviewed and conversed with other on-line media users. In particular, she and the others were "trying to make sense of what it means to be there" (p. 18). The participants, including

Markham, were experimenting with their sense of self on-line: "By logging onto my computer, I (or part of me) can seem to (or perhaps actually) exist separately from my body in 'places' formed by the exchange of messages" (p. 17).

People exchanging messages on-line apply a text—on-line dialogue—to communicate with each other and create a sense of reality as well as a sense of on-line identity. According to Markham, despite the fact that communication takes place through fiber-optic cables, the interactants actually "feel a sense of presence" (p. 17) of the other: "We feel we meet in the flesh. . . . Everywhere we rub shoulders with each other" (Argyle, quoted in Markham 1998:17).

The identities that interactants create on-line may differ from their other identities, as the lack of visual communication allows one to create a practically new self if one so wishes. The interaction can also be very different from face-to-face communication, because the interactants, visually hidden as they are, can formulate "false nonverbals," claiming feelings and emotions that do not correspond to their demeanor. This type of interviewing takes away from one of the traditional strengths of qualitative research, which is perennially based on the claim, "I saw it, I heard it, I was there."

In a way, using on-line interviews is not very different from Crapanzano's (1980) use of Tuhami's dreams and lies as data, which he presents as just as valid as Tuhami's recounting of real events. Crapanzano found all of these elements to be of equal help in creating Tuhami's biography. Similarly, whatever elements help people communicating on-line to create and sustain a sense of on-line identity in their dialogue are an integral part of their working subjectivity.

Researchers' increased reliance upon computers has faced the criticism of social commentators for some time (see, among others, Dreyfus 1979; Searle 1984). These

critics contend that computers are not mere aids that facilitate research; rather, they drastically change our lives and modes of communication. That modern-day "Lud-dite" Neal Postman (1993) states, "The fundamental metaphoric message of the computer, in short, is that we are machines—thinking machines, to be sure, but machines nonetheless" (p. 111). According to Postman, reliance on machines will increase human belief in scientism, with the result that we will try to scientize and cloak in the language of science the stories we tell. John Murphy (1999) echoes the sentiment. He sees qualitative researchers as being pressured by the ethos of the times and the demands of academia and granting agencies into the use of computers and software programs such as ETHNO, QualPro, and the Ethnograph (see Seale, Chapter 31, this volume). Murphy warns that computers will not merely help us to sort out the data, but will lead us to seek precise responses, removing ambiguity from interview material. Rather than created, negotiated, face-to-face narratives, we will be left with artificially derived categories that will reify our results and have little to do with the world of everyday life.

◆ *Representational Practices*

One of the most controversial areas of postmodern-informed interview research centers on the question of how empirical material should be represented. Traditionally, the writing of social science has mimicked the sparse prose of the natural sciences (see Geertz 1988). John Van Maanen (1988) has analyzed the more recent changes in reporting styles and found that they are moving toward the literary. With postmodern-informed reporting practices, writing engages new, experimental, and highly controversial forms of representation. Mindful of the postmodern collapse of disciplinary barriers, social researchers

are using literature, poetry, and even plays to represent interview narratives.

AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Carolyn Ellis (1995a), Jeffrey Riemer (1977), and others have been employing autoethnography to conflate the traditional distinction between the interviewer and the respondent. Ellis, for example, writes about her past experiences in what becomes a form of retrospective self-interview and narrative reconstruction of life events. The crucial difference between this work and traditional representation is that Ellis aims to recount her own feelings about interview topics that apply to her as a researcher and subject of the experience under consideration, thus combining the roles of interviewer and interviewee. As a result, we are witness to many personally conveyed epiphanic moments in her life, moments that could be our very own. For example, she has written about the agony of facing the death of her brother in an airplane crash (1993), her uneasy encounter with a friend dying of AIDS (1995b), and the slow spiral toward death of her beloved partner, who was stricken with a terminal illness (1995a). In the same vein, Laurel Richardson (1999) has written a personal narrative of her misadventures with paternalistic faculty colleagues after a car accident. Troy McGinnis's (1999) presentation "The Art of Leaving" is about his stumbling upon his wife and a best friend in an intimate situation, and Norman Denzin (1999b, 1999c) has written stories about his hideout in Montana. These are just a few of the many recent autoethnographic (self-interviewing) representations of experience.

POETRY

Laurel Richardson extends this trend to poetic representation (see Richardson, Chapter 42, this volume). After lengthy in-

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interview sessions with a southern, middle-aged, single mother, Richardson (1997) transformed the woman's sad and powerful tale into a poem, which she recites masterfully, in a sorrowful southern drawl. A segment follows, which in Richardson's view comes fully to life only in its recitation.

So, the Doctor said, "You're pregnant."

I was 41. John and I

had had a happy kind of relationship,
not a serious one.

But beside himself with fear and anger,
awful, rageful, vengeful, horrid,

Jody May's father said,
"Get an Abortion."

I told him,

"I would never marry you.

I would never marry you.

I would never." (P. 133)

Others have followed Richardson's lead into the realm of sociological poetry. For example, Patricia Clough's (1999) angst-filled poetic presentation "A Child Is Being Killed" took the place of the keynote address at a recent symposium of the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction.

STAGED PLAYS AND PERFORMANCES

Scripted performance also has been rallied to enhance the "scenic presence" (Holstein and Gubrium 2000) of interview-based reports of experience. Richardson, for example, not only constructs poetic accounts but uses plays to tell her stories, at times soliciting participation from her audience (see Richardson 1997). Indeed, dramatic realization has become a broadly popular mode of expression. Jim Miencza-

kowski and Steve Morgan (1998) have dressed as police officers to act out their counseling interviews, which were completed in Queensland, Australia. I personally donned black clothing and a white mask to portray Farinelli, the castrato, in reporting on a study of transsexuals (Fontana and Schmidt 1998, 1999). Robert Schmidt and I enlisted Jennifer O'Brien's help in producing a polyphonic play based on in-depth interviews with a lap dancer (Schmidt and Fontana 1998).

At times, however, performances have moved from the sublime to the studiously ridiculous. For example, I have witnessed sociologist Stephen Pfohl (1995) strip to black bikini bottoms at the culmination of his video-music play, and, more recently, I watched as a graduate student smeared himself with bean dip to convey the ironies of Latino identity. Postmodern trends have taken representation a long way from the guarded prose of research reports.

♦ Conclusion

Clearly, postmodernism has influenced interviewing, loosening it from many of its traditional moorings. Perhaps it has accomplished its goal—imploding traditional interviewing to leave it in fragments, each crying out to be appreciated in its own way. Some see this fragmentation as a healthy sign, because we have many groups with different approaches and methods all presenting their wares (Adler and Adler 1999). Others feel threatened by it and, in various ways, decry the ostensible chaos (Best 1995; Dawson and Prus 1993; Prus 1996; Sanders 1995; Shalin 1993). Yet another response strikes a balance between the modern and postmodern, staking a middle-ground approach to incorporate innovative postmodern ideas with more traditional precepts (Gubrium and Holstein 1998; Holstein and Gubrium 1995). And, finally, there are those who are oblivious to these trends, who continue to be guided by tradi-

tional rules of both qualitative and quantitative inquiry (Murphy 1999; Adler and Adler 1999).

Shadowing the differences is the prospect that the interview can no longer be viewed as a discreet event, the straightforward result of asking questions and receiving answers. Indeed, even the traditional "conversation with a purpose," which until recently was a way of conceptualizing the survey interview, has increasingly given way to evidence of the systematic communicative work that produces interview data (see Schaeffer and Maynard, Chapter 28, this volume). Survey researchers themselves are systematically discovering something they have always suspected: that both the interviewer and the respondent negotiate and work together to accomplish the interview, the resulting "data" being as much a product of interview participants' collaborative efforts as of the experiences under consideration. Postmodern trends in the area are seemingly coming full circle, back to where they began. Increasingly, we are learning that what Paul Rabinow (1977) said about informant and researcher in ethnography also applies to the interviewer and the respondent: "The common understanding they construct is fragile and thin, but it is upon this shaky ground that anthropological inquiry proceeds" (p. 39).

■ Notes

1. Following Lee Harvey (1987), I see ethnography and in-depth interviewing as much more intertwined than methodologists usually do. Indeed, fieldwork relies on a combination of both methods. Harvey points out that many of the works of the Chicago school, which are commonly referred to as "ethnographic," actually rely on in-depth interviews. As early as Malinowski's fieldwork in New Guinea, the two methods have been combined. In fact, Malinowski did not actually live in the village with the natives, but would go there only occasionally, with an interpreter, to interview them (Malinowski 1989; also see Lofland 1971).

2. Shifting subject positions have traditionally been glossed over in interview research. Seidman (1991) recounts that in his study of community college faculty, he was treated either with deference because of his affiliation with what was perceived to be a higher status institution (the university) or with suspicion because of his affiliation with the "ivory tower." The difference was important in how it mediated the organization of responses. In my study of poor elderly (Fontana 1977), the fact that I was young led to my being treated with extreme suspicion. This was because the elderly people I approached saw my explanation that I was conducting interviews for my dissertation as a cover for some kind of "con game," because some young men who had recently approached them "for similar reasons" were con men and pimps.

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