Handbook of INTERVIEW RESEARCH

Context & Method

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INTERVIEWING CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

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The task of interviewing children and adolescents presents researchers with unique opportunities and dilemmas. Although some researchers advocate participant observation and ethnography rather than interviewing in the study of children (Corsaro 1997; Prout and James 1997; Weisner 1996), we believe there is a place for the interview approach in such research. We have found that interviewing can be used successfully with children from preschool age (e.g., Davies 1989) through high school age (e.g., Eckert 1989). Although very young children may not be as comfortable as adolescents in one-on-one interviews with adults, most of the issues we present in this chapter are applicable to a range of age groups.

One clear reason for interviewing youthful respondents is to allow them to give voice to their own interpretations and thoughts rather than rely solely on our adult interpretations of their lives. For example, rather than forming our own views on the content of the media that children use, it is important that we find out how they are interpreting the messages they receive through books, television, movies, and magazines. Another reason for interviewing young people is to study those topics that are salient in their lives but do not occur in daily conversations or interactions. For example, although family relationships are very salient to many adolescents, they seldom discuss these relationships in their daily conversations with peers. Likewise, adolescents discuss topics such as sexuality and menstruation in joking or playful terms, if they discuss them at all, in public settings. Thus re-

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searchers interested in these topics have relied more extensively on interviews than on observations (Lees 1993; Tolman 1994). Finally, some topics that do occur naturally in young people's daily conversations do not occur on a regular enough basis to warrant the time it would take to study them through participant observation. For example, although some boys regularly discuss media events in their daily conversations, girls are much less likely to do so on a regular basis (Eder 1995; Milkie 1994). Thus for collecting girls' interpretations of media, conducting interviews with groups of girls is a much more efficient method than observation (see Fingerson 1999).

When interviewing children, it is essential that researchers begin by examining the power dynamics between adults and youth. Researchers do not always recognize that, in general, children have lower status than adults and lack power in Western societies. Berry Mayall (1999) advocates seeing children as their own minority group compared to the adults who order and control their lives, viewing them as lacking essential abilities and characteristics of adulthood. For Mayall, "child" is a relational category defining children as subordinate to the superordinate "adult." Ivar Frønes (1994) also argues that children are primarily seen as an "age group," which positions them low in the overall age-graded power structure, rather than as a group with its own culture and unique abilities. According to Suzanne Hood, Berry Mayall, and Sandy Oliver (1999), children are a socially disadvantaged and disempowered group, not only because of their age but because of their position in society as the "researched" and never the "researchers."

Interviewers need to be sensitive to this power imbalance. Gary Alan Fine and Kent Sandstrom (1988) argue that in any participation event with children, the adults cannot have equal status because "the social roles of the participants have been influenced by age, cognitive development, physical maturity, and acquisition of social responsibility" (p. 14). Children are taught

all their lives to listen to, respect, and obey adults. They are surrounded by teachers, parents, relatives, and adult friends who all have the power to command children's actions (Caputo 1995; see also in this volume Adler and Adler, Chapter 25; Briggs, Chapter 44).

Throughout this chapter, we will explore various ways in which researchers can address this power dynamic, our first theme, when interviewing children and adolescents. In the first section below, we argue that the adult researcher's power can be reduced while making the interviewing context more natural if children are interviewed as a group rather than as individuals. Thus, unlike in most other chapters in this *Handbook*, the reader should assume that we are referring to group interviews unless otherwise specified (see also Morgan, Chapter 7, this volume). In the next section, we emphasize reciprocity as a central means for responding to the potential power inequality between adult researchers and youthful respondents. We argue that the concept of reciprocity can be applied at several levels, from directly empowering respondents to using research findings to enrich and improve the lives of children through an action-oriented research focus. Finally, we return to the theme of power dynamics as we discuss how to represent youth in their own terms.

A second theme of this chapter is the importance of using multiple methods. Although some interviewers may seek only to collect interview data, we argue that a brief period of observation should precede the interviewing process, so that interviewers can identify natural contexts for interviewing and children's own speech routines (see in this volume Dunbar, Rodriguez, and Parker, Chapter 14; Atkinson and Coffey, Chapter 38). We also believe that a sociolinguistic approach can strengthen the validity of interviews as well as complement other modes of data analysis by showing *how* certain beliefs are acquired and communicated. Finally, we discuss how researchers can combine group interviews

with single interviews and with content analysis of media to enhance our understanding of children and adolescents.

◆ Creating a Natural Context

One of the most important considerations in interview research with young people is the creation of a natural context for the interview. This can mean different things depending on the ages of the children being interviewed. Studies of peer culture among youth have emphasized the importance of social learning in the context of groups (Corsaro and Eder 1995; Eder 1995; Corsaro 1997). Children, especially young children, acquire social knowledge through interaction with others as they construct meanings through a shared process. This is also the most natural way for them to communicate social knowledge to others. Some researchers have found that African American children are more comfortable in group settings (Holmes 1998), and we have found that European American children are also relaxed and engage in typical peer routines when interviewed in groups (Simon, Eder, and Evans 1992; Eder 1995; Fingerson 1999).

The group setting is also important for minimizing the power differential between the researcher and those being studied. Power dynamics occur in all interview studies, in that the researcher has control over the research process as well as over much of the interview by virtue of being the one posing the questions. As noted previously, in studies of youth the researcher also has the added power associated with age. Both of these aspects can be minimized to some degree when interviewing takes place in group settings, as children are more relaxed in the company of their peers and are more comfortable knowing that they outnumber the adults in the setting. Also, there is less chance for a researcher to impose adult interpretations and language on the young people if they are interviewed collectively

and have the opportunity to develop and convey aspects of peer culture in their talk.

Group interviews grow directly out of peer culture, as children construct their meanings collectively with their peers. In group interviews (also referred to as focus groups), participants build on each other's talk and discuss a wider range of experiences and opinions than may develop in individual interviews (Morgan 1993). Also, the interaction in focus groups can elicit more accurate accounts, as participants must defend their statements to their peers, especially if the group is made up of individuals who interact on a daily basis. Although participants in focus groups are sometimes taken out of their natural settings, if an interview is conducted with an existing group of friends or peers, the conversations in the focus group are more indicative of those occurring in a natural setting (Albrecht, Johnson, and Walther 1993). As an alternative approach, some researchers have conducted whole-class interviews with elementary school students (Adler and Adler 1998). This technique allows interviewers to ask children from a variety of peer groups to discuss their different perspectives on issues of social power among peers.

The naturalness of the interview context can be furthered developed if the interview is placed within a larger activity with which the respondents are already familiar. According to Julie Tammivaara and D. Scott Enright (1986), researchers can reduce the artificiality of interviews by embedding them into everyday activities such as recess, "show and tell," "circle time," or sessions of ongoing small instructional groups. In some cases, interviewers might create new games that are similar to the types of games children naturally engage in, such as "Let's Pretend" or "Telling Stories," and embed their interviews in these meaningful activities. Robyn Holmes (1998) notes that she avoids formal interviews with children and instead conducts informal individual and group interviews during free-play time, while children take part in drawing activi-

ties, or on the playground. In addition, she has developed journalistic role-play scenarios in which she and the children take turns interviewing each other. Brenda Bryant (1985) conducted individual interviews with children while taking them on "neighborhood walks." The walks are intended to make the setting more inviting as well as to elicit cues and reminders to promote more accurate reporting of neighborhood experiences. In all of these cases, by avoiding decontextualized interview situations, researchers have been able to elicit more natural and valid responses from young respondents.

Another aspect of creating a natural context in the interview involves gaining an understanding of the communicative rules used by the youth being studied. Charles Briggs (1986) has argued that interview studies should be grounded in the discourse of those being interviewed. This is especially true in studies of youth, who often have their own discourse styles and peer culture. According to Briggs, the design, implementation, and analysis of interviews should emerge from an awareness of the nature of the respondents' communicative competence. The researcher can learn the communicative norms of the youth being studied through a combination of observation and informal interviewing prior to the formal interviewing process. In this observation period, the researcher should pay careful attention to the young people's sense of questions and the appropriateness of their timing and use in different contexts. Briggs also recommends that the researcher perform a microanalysis of a selected interview as a way to develop a clearer understanding of the respondents' discourse patterns. (We consider the topic of sociolinguistic analysis of interview data later in this chapter.)

One innovative approach to interview research with children is the use of children as interviewers. Tobias Hecht (1998), in a study of street children in Brazil, found success having kids take the tape recorder and interview other kids on their own. Through this method, Hecht discovered many modes of discourse and ways of referring to the home, family, and the street that were invaluable in his own interviewing and observations.

Another way in which a researcher can help respondents' norms to emerge is through the careful structuring of the interview itself. The best interview emerges from a state of egalitarian cooperation in which both the researcher and respondents form the discourse (Briggs 1986). Shulamit Reinharz (1992) advocates beginning the interview with very unstructured questions, to allow the respondents' concerns to emerge. She notes that the interviewer should be less concerned with getting his or her questions answered than with understanding the people being interviewed. In studies of youth, it is especially important for interviewers to emphasize nondirected, open, and inclusive questions (Tammivaara and Enright 1986). If the questions are open-ended, the children will have more opportunity to bring in the topics and modes of discourse that are familiar to them. Also, nondirected questions provide more opportunity for children in group interviews to collaborate in their answers and to expand on the responses of others. This type of interaction is typical of the discourse styles in many peer cultures and is reflective of children's natural way of developing shared meanings (Eder 1988, 1995).

In attempting to create a natural context for the interview, the researcher must also take care to avoid creating situations that remind youth of classroom lessons based on "known-answer" questions. Because many students are exposed to the type of lessons in which questions are asked for the purpose of getting correct answers (Tammivaara and Enright 1986), respondents in a research setting who are asked similar types of questions may seek to provide the answers they feel are expected of them rather than stating what they actually think or feel. In addition, Tammivaara and Enright (1986) suggest that interviewers

should avoid certain controlling behaviors that might associate them with teachers, such as asking respondents to stop fidgeting or to stop being silly. Instead, they recommend that some of the interview time be taken up with playing with items or figuratively playing with questions; they observe that this will lead to more valid information in the end.

Another way the interviewer can avoid being associated with the classroom teacher is by resisting being the one to initiate all activities during the interview (Corsaro 1981; Tammivaara and Enright 1986). Lessons in which right answers are sought seldom include the opportunity for children to develop and ask their own questions. By inviting the children's questions and comments throughout the interview, the interviewer conveys a different context of developing knowledge. By encouraging respondents to initiate questions and comments, the interviewer breaks down the basic power dimension of the interview context by personalizing and humanizing him- or herself and empowering the respondents. In addition, when the interviewer gives respondents opportunities to introduce their own topics and concerns into the discussion, the knowledge shared and gained reflects the interests of the youth being studied as well as the interests of the researcher. Judith Cook and Mary Fonow (1986) note that feminist researchers who want to avoid treating their subjects as "objects of knowledge" use an interactive interviewing approach that allows their respondents to have a voice during the production of the data. In interview research with children, researchers can also report their findings back to the children to check the accuracy of the adults' interpretations (Mayall 1999). This allows the children to hear what the researchers think and to respond directly to researchers' interpretations of their lives.

One of the key aspects of the interview approach recommended here is flexibility. Although the researcher will have certain questions in mind to start, he or she must be willing to let the interview develop by allowing opportunities for new questions to emerge based on what is shared during the interview. These questions may arise from anyone, not just the researcher. Also, flexibility allows for changes in setting and procedure as the needs and interests of the youth being studied are revealed. It may become clear only as the interview process progresses that certain questions are inappropriate due either to ethical or substantive considerations, and these should then be omitted. On the other hand, new questions may emerge that better capture the experiences of the youth, and these might become the focus of an added stage of the research.

◆ Reciprocity as a Response to Power Dynamics

Current discussions of ethics regarding research on youth are too often limited to debates regarding the protection of children's rights. Although we support these concerns, we believe that this focus has limited the perception of ethical responsibility to that of guarding individual rights. We believe that in order to respond to the power dynamics in research with children, researchers must expand this ethical discussion to include a greater emphasis on reciprocity. The researcher's desire to gain information from child participants without giving something in return reflects an underlying sense of the adult researcher's privilege. However, by giving something in return for receiving this information, researchers can reduce the potential power inequality.

Reciprocity can take place on several levels. One important level is within the interview itself. Researchers can treat respondents in such a way that they receive something from participating in the study, whether it be a greater sense of empowerment, a greater understanding of their own

life experiences, or both. Feminist researchers have discussed some general ways in which respondents may be empowered through interviews (Lather 1988; Reinharz 1992). For example, researchers can promote interactive interviews in which the researchers self-disclose along with participants. Researchers can also conduct multiple interviews with the same individuals, promoting a greater level of depth. Some feminist researchers also advocate the use of group interviews and the collective negotiation of interpretations. All of these strategies are designed to promote respondents' empowerment by encouraging respondents' self-reflection as well as researchers' deeper understanding of the respondents' situation in their worlds.

Some researchers who have interviewed adolescents have commented on the potential for adolescents to gain from the research experience. In a study of girls from different ethnic and social backgrounds, Jill Taylor, Carol Gilligan, and Amy Sullivan (1995) found that the individual interviews conducted by adult females provided these girls with opportunities to think through issues of importance to them by talking about them with interested adults. During these interviews the girls were less afraid of judgment, betrayal, misunderstanding, and anger than is generally the case when adolescents talk with adults. One respondent told the interviewer that she was able to speak freely because the interviewer was clearly interested in her. This led her to discuss things that she did not feel she could share with family members or even with friends. Some of the girls also said they were able to gain new insights about themselves during the course of their interviews. As one said: "But since the question came up, it let me know how I felt. I think that's good. I can do this forever you know ... keep on going. I'll bring a lot up with just easy questions that you would ask anybody, you know. It lets you know about yourself" (p. 129).

Similarly, Penelope Eckert (1989) found that many participants thanked her for the opportunity to think and talk in a struc-

tured way about themselves and their high school issues. When she began her study, she was not prepared for the number of students who needed an interested adult to talk with about themselves. As the interview setting was both nonjudgmental and confidential, her respondents found their interviews to be safer than most conversations with adults.

Taylor et al. (1995) found that the adolescent girls they interviewed felt close to their mothers but did not feel they could talk to them about anything "important." White and Hispanic girls in particular have been found to have difficulty discussing issues of sexuality with their mothers (Ward and Taylor 1991). James Youniss and Jacqueline Smollar (1985) have reported that in discussions with their parents, compared to conversations with their friends, adolescents are more likely to be careful about what they say, are more likely to hide their true feelings, and are less likely to talk about doubts and fear. Given the difficulty adolescents have in talking with the adults to whom they are closest, it is not surprising that some interviewers have found their young respondents eager to be listened to in a nonjudgmental and accepting manner.

Reciprocity can also take the form of giving something back to the community in which the study takes place and/or including some form of social action or social change as part of the project. People of color have written about the importance of service in their respective ethnic communities. For example, Rayna Green (1990) says that what she does with her scholarship needs to work for people, to bring about change in some way. Patricia Hill Collins (1990) believes that thought and action should be tied closely together. For example, the struggle for self-definition among African American women includes a merging of thought and action to eliminate oppression. Creating safe communities is an important form of activism, but, Collins argues, it is not enough; broader forms of change are also needed, such as transformations in social institutions.

An interest in action-oriented research is growing among qualitative researchers. As they move away from the view that qualitative research is a detached science, researchers are realizing that they influence the participants in their studies and are in turn influenced by them (Lincoln and Denzin 1994). As researchers accept that such impacts are inevitable, many have begun to consider ways to make their influences more positive. This has led to the consideration of a new measure of validity, one that reflects the degree to which a given research project empowers and emancipates a research community (Lather 1988).

Researchers who interview youth are also calling for more action-oriented research as well as for more discussion on ethics, praxis, and qualitative work. Angela Valenzuela (1999) found a unique opportunity to assist one of the English teachers in the high school in which she was conducting research. The seasoned teacher was having difficulty controlling the classroom and asked Valenzuela to speak to his class. During her visit, she not only gathered valuable data, but was able to speak with the kids openly and honestly, diffuse the situation, and explain to the teacher the roots of the difficult classroom dynamics.

In her work with high school dropouts, Michelle Fine (1994) sought to represent the voices of African American and Hispanic adolescents in courts and public policy debates as well as in academic scholarship. She raises several dilemmas associated with this action-oriented work, including whether or not others resent her speaking on their behalf and whether she might be colluding with structures of domination when her white, middle-class translation of her respondents' words is given more authority than their own narratives. She advises that those who do such work need to create communities of friendly critical informants who can help determine whose voices and analyses are foregrounded.

Fine's experience highlights the fact that differences in culture and power make researchers' attempts at reciprocity especially challenging. What may be culturally appropriate in one context may not be in another. Also, any attempt to affect change by researchers who hold greater power due to their ethnicity and/or social class may be viewed negatively by others. In such cases it is crucial that researchers consult informants about the cultural norms of reciprocity and be willing to work collaboratively for change rather than as independent agents.

In our own research projects with young people, we have sought to include some aspect of service to the communities in which the research took place. In Laura Fingerson's case, she volunteered at "Girls Inc.," the organization in which she collected her data, both before interviewing the girls for her study and then for the following two years. During that time she brought many of her academic skills, such as knowledge of computing, into the environment to enrich the lives of the girls who had participated in her study as well as other girls in this setting. After completing her study of gender, status, and peer culture, Donna Eder applied much of what she and others have learned about peer culture in developing a conflict intervention program for the schools in the community she studied. KACTIS (Kids Against Cruel Treatment in Schools) relied primarily on speech routines that were natural aspects of children's own cultures, such as role-play and collaborative performances. During these familiar routines, children developed alternative approaches for dealing with conflict and abuse that they had witnessed in their school.

We believe that researchers should consider how they can best benefit the communities in which their research takes place by considering from the start possible applications of their research for action as well as for theory. Those involved in action-oriented research have, like Fine (1994), faced political issues and dilemmas related to their attempts to benefit others. For example, Christopher Goodey's (1999) research on assessing the needs of students

with learning disabilities reveals the importance of using the concept of "difficulty" rather than "need":

> In qualitative work difficulties must be critically probed rather than just ticked off, whereas research methods based on a concept of need tend to forestall reflexivity or mutual understanding. The notion of difficulty thus has a clear interactive character. It enables us to see something not purely as a consequence of specific characteristics of the child, but of the encounter between the child and [context] and thus to question the supposed division between "special" (pathological) and normal needs. (P. 4)

In her discussion of research involving community intervention, Joan Sieber (1992) notes that researchers may be restricted as to what they can do by members of the community who seek to protect the rights of youth. She warns that researchers involved in community intervention should decide ahead of time who will have access to their data. They should also consider how they can avoid using certain terms in their studies that could potentially stigmatize children, such as *sexually promiscuous* and *at risk,* so that their participants do not face any additional labeling when their data are employed to benefit others in the community.

◆ Combining Interviews with Other Methods

A combination of methods is often useful in research because it is difficult for any single method to capture fully the richness of human experience (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). Because children's experiences are grounded in their own peer cultures and life experiences, it is especially important that researchers use interviews in combination with other methods, both to obtain more valid responses and to strengthen the analysis of interview data. In this section we look at research that has combined group interviews with field observation, content analysis of media, and individual interviews.

COMBINING INTERVIEWS WITH FIELD OBSERVATION

Field observation has often been combined with interviewing in studies of youth. In some cases, observation sets the ground for the interviews, which are the primary mode of data collection. In other cases, participant observation is the main methodology and interviews are used to complement the collection of field notes based on extensive observation. Finally, some studies draw equally on both methods or combine them with additional methods, such as the use of diaries, surveys, or recorded observations.

We believe that it is essential to begin an interview study with at least some type of field observation. This could take place over a few days or a much longer period, depending on the setting and the research agenda. Without such initial observation, the researcher will find it difficult to assess how to introduce the interviews into the setting in a natural manner. Through observation, the researcher can identify naturally occurring events during which interviews could take place as well as typical language routines in the setting. Observation also helps the researcher to assess some of the basic communicative norms and patterns that children of given ages and backgrounds are using, so that he or she can modify the interview format to include them. Finally, observation can increase the researcher's general understanding of the children's local culture and social structure.

Whether or not interviewing is the main methodology in a study, a period of field observation can enable the researcher to gain rapport with the children prior to interviewing them. Fingerson spent a month volunteering in the setting prior to inter-

viewing girls in groups about their reactions to family television programs. Eder and her colleagues spent several months observing adolescent lunchtime and after-school activities before formulating certain questions that they then asked in interviews with groups of students during lunchtime. In both cases, the initial periods of observation allowed us to establish a high degree of rapport with respondents, so that we could join in their conversations during the interviews, making them seem extensions of their naturally occurring talk.

Just as observations are a useful supplement to an interview-based study, interviews can add important information to studies based primarily on participant or field observation. Although interviews have played an important role in many ethnographic studies of children and youth, only some ethnographers have taken the time to write directly about their interviewing decisions. Penelope Eckert (1989), who studied social categories and identities in high school, notes that she purposely allowed her group interviews to be highly unstructured. She formed her groups by asking a student she knew to gather a group of friends to talk about "stuff." When the group met, she let them talk about whatever topics they considered interesting or important, asking questions only to get the discussion under way.

Likewise, in his study of suburban youth, Ralph Larkin (1979) emphasized the importance of unstructured group interviews. Rather than asking predetermined questions in his interviews, he developed his role as that of a discussion facilitator to a student-based conversation. Larkin purposely avoided the use of more structured questions that would place the definitions of concepts and reality in the hands of the researcher. He wanted his interviews to tap into the students' own reality rather than force their experiences and ideas to fit predetermined categories.

In Eder's study of adolescent peer cultures, the researchers used group interviews to collect more information on con-

cepts and processes that were clearly salient based on observations, but were not fully explained by them (Eder 1995; Simon et al. 1992). For example, although popularity and status hierarchy were obvious concepts, the researchers needed to ask students specifically: "What makes certain students more popular than others?" and "What does it mean to be popular?" These questions arose in part because the researchers associated popularity with being well liked, but the students' comments during natural conversations and during the interviews suggested that they did not. In addition, because romantic feelings toward boys were such a major preoccupation for some groups of girls, the researchers asked them several questions regarding their views on the importance of boys in their lives and the difference between concepts of "liking" and "going with" someone. These interviews ended up revealing a set of norms that girls more or less agreed upon regarding romantic feelings at their age. In both cases, the researchers used interviews primarily to help them understand the adolescents' perceptions and views of these concepts and processes, rather than relying solely on their own interpretations.

Although interviewing can add important information to participant observation studies, researchers should also be aware of the limitations of interviews. There are aspects of children's cultures that are difficult to put into words, and these aspects need to be captured through direct observation rather than interviews. For example, Bronwyn Davies (1989), who studied preschool children, says this about her experience observing their play:

> Sometimes the children would provide an explanation if they came to talk to me. But there was often no immediate answer, for neither they nor I could *say* what it was that was going on because we did not know how to find the words or concepts that would encapsulate the event. To this extent the children's world was as yet only partially shaped

by language, by linguistic symbolic forms. And for this reason learning to interact with them on their own terms was of central importance. (P. 39)

INTERVIEWS AS PART OF MEDIA INTERPRETATION STUDIES

Group interviewing of children is a particularly good method for gathering data for use in media reception analysis. Many studies examining media have focused only on media content rather than on how audiences interpret the media themselves (Greenberg 1980; Cantor 1991; Cantor and Cantor 1992). How audiences perceive and understand television, for example, is not determined solely by programmed content (Granello 1997); rather, viewers select from and assign significance to specific televised messages through social interaction and experience. Janice Radway (1984) terms the social groups in which viewers collectively interpret media texts "interpretive communities." These are the groups with which viewers discuss, evaluate, and interpret television programs. They include children's peer groups. Because watching television consumes such large amounts of their time, children discuss television meanings as a social activity, and through this interaction they create meanings out of the programs' messages and content (Peterson and Peters 1983; Milkie 1994; Gillespie 1995).

It is important that researchers examine the perceptions and interpretations that youth have of media rather than relying solely on their own adult interpretations, such as is done in content analysis studies. For example, Robert Hodge and David Tripp (1986) combined semiotic content analysis with audience reception analysis in a study of 8- to 12-year-old Australian children's responses to the cartoon *Fangface.* They specifically argue for the importance of language: "For these children it is as

though their own thoughts and feelings do not really exist unless they become public and visible through language: the language of others requiring attention and consciousness, their own language reinforcing or sometimes deforming their fluid, inchoate structures of meaning" (p. 66). We agree with this formulation, which emphasizes how important group processes and language are in enabling us to understand children's worlds.

In Fingerson's (1999) research, she used individual interviews combined with focus groups to uncover how middle school girls individually and collectively interpreted family television programs. In particular, she found it interesting to see what the girls focused on in their group discussions. For example, the individual interviews brought up a variety of different issues, but in the focus groups, the girls particularly enjoyed discussing issues of the body brought up in the television programs viewed.

In one group, the girls discussed how Tim, a character on the television program *Home Improvement,* slipped and fell into a portable toilet from the top of a high steel structure at a construction site. The girls expanded and elaborated on this scene in a sequence of collaborative talk dealing with issues of body control and bodily functions. One girl noted that Tim's falling into the portable toilet was realistic because "I can't even balance on a curb!" Body control was uncovered as a salient theme in their culture, possibly because growing limbs and changing centers of gravity leave many girls in their age group feeling unusually clumsy, like Tim. According to the culturalist approach (McRobbie 1991), one cannot summarily determine the effects and meanings of media programs through their content; rather, these effects and meanings are shaped by the individual viewer's attachment of salience to particular events and experiences. The use of group interviews in combination with individual interviews is an excellent way for researchers to access children's and adolescents' understanding of media.

Other studies of children's interpretations of media indicate that children sometimes interpret stories very differently than do adults. In her study of feminist stories, Davies (1989) was surprised to find that some of the preschool children she interviewed expressed viewpoints that did not initially make sense to her, as in the following example:[1]

B.D.: If you were Oliver and you hated all the boy's things and you wanted to do girl's things, would you want to go to dancing school?

Robbie: No.

B.D.: (reads about boys teasing Oliver) So what sort of boys are they?

Robbie: Big, they//

B.D.: Big boys, and should they say that to Oliver Button?

Robbie: Yes.

B.D.: They should? (surprised) . . . (reads about boys writing "Oliver Button is a Sissy" on the school wall) How does Oliver feel?

Robbie: Sad.

B.D.: He's very sad isn't he? So should the boys have written that on the wall?

Robbie: (nods)

B.D.: They should? (surprised) Why should they have written that on the wall?

Robbie: Because he, because he's a sissy doing tap dancing.

B.D.: (reads about Oliver practicing his dancing) So why do you suppose he keeps going though everybody gives him a hard time there?

Robbie: Because he just wants to.

B.D.: He just wants to and should you keep doing what you want to do even though everybody keeps giving you a hard time?

Robbie: (nods) (Pp. 27-28)

Davies notes several contradictions in Robbie's responses as viewed from an adult perspective. Robbie states that it is both right to tease someone who is deviating and right to keep doing what you want to do. Also, even though he knows the teasing makes Oliver sad, he believes that the teasing is okay. It is important to realize that what might be contradictory viewpoints for an adult might not be contradictory for a child. It is only through interviewing children about media that researchers can reveal these different perspectives.

COMBINING SINGLE AND GROUP INTERVIEWS

In this chapter we have advocated using group interviews with children, as these can nicely capture group interactive processes in an efficient way (Morgan 1993). Also, guided interviewing techniques used in focus groups can uncover specific concepts and feelings in the peer culture of interest to the researcher that are not always spoken about regularly in everyday settings. Finally, group interviews readily allow children's own conversational styles to appear.

Some researchers have also found success with individual interviews, such as Carol Gilligan in her studies of girls' self-esteem, confidence, and communication styles (Gilligan 1982; Gilligan, Lyons, and Hanmer 1990; Brown and Gilligan 1992; Taylor et al. 1995) and Youniss and Smollar (1985) in their research on adolescents' relations with their mothers, fathers, and friends. Although Lyn Mikel Brown and Gilligan (1992) note their concern about their respondents' possibly tailoring their

answers to seek approval from the researchers, we find mixed evidence of this. As the example from Davies's (1989) study presented above shows, Davies found that children frequently gave answers that were different from those she expected or approved of, even when being interviewed alone. She notes that the children simply saw her as another person who needed to have the way the world really is explained to her.

Individual interviews are especially common in studies of sexuality and body issues. For example, Deborah Tolman (1994) interviewed girls about their experiences and feelings of sexual desire; Sue Lees (1993) interviewed mostly girls and some boys about their sexuality and how they experience their worlds; Michelle Fine and Pat Macpherson (1994) interviewed teenage girls on adolescent feminism, including femininity and sexuality; and Roberta Simmons and Dale Blyth (1987) interviewed both boys and girls on the combined impacts of pubertal change and changing school contexts on self-esteem and self-image.

Sharon Thompson (1995) interviewed girls individually about sexuality, love, and romance and found great success in assessing these girls' narratives of their experience through long, open-ended interviews. Most of these interviews were individual, although she interviewed some respondents in pairs or occasionally in groups. Thompson states: "Their accounts sometimes had a polished quality that made them seem rehearsed, and in a way they were. These were the stories that teenage girls spend hundreds of hours telling each other, going over and over detail and possibility, reporting, strategizing, problem solving, constructing sexual and existential meaning for themselves" (p. 4). Thompson was able to tap into an existing mode of talk for these girls—one-on-one conversations about their romantic and sexual experiences that they already do in their everyday lives with friends.

Using both single and group interviews in conjunction can be an effective method for uncovering social phenomena among older children and adolescents. Older children and adolescents have the developmental capacity to reflect upon their experiences in the manner needed to complete individual interviews successfully. By including single interviews in research, the investigator can examine the participants' individual attitudes, opinions, and contexts and use this information to understand more fully the discussion occurring in the group interviews. Peggy Orenstein (1994) conducted group interviews first in her study of eighth-grade girls in school and then selected individuals from those groups to interview alone in further depth to understand more about their individual contexts, feelings, and experiences.

In addition, some themes may be discussed in individual interviews that may not appear in group discussions but are still important and relevant to the participants and their individual understandings of their social worlds. In this way, the researcher can explore social interaction dimensions. For example, in Hecht's (1998) research with Brazilian street children, the children interviewed in group settings would often defend their mothers to others even though they were not living at home with them. In private conversations, however, they would often reveal feelings of rejection and abandonment by their mothers.

Fingerson (1999) used a combination of individual interviews and focus groups in her research on girls' interpretations of family television programs. Background questions asked in one-on-one settings are particularly necessary in reception analysis; in Fingerson's research, the answers to such questions were essential to her understanding of the unique context of each girl's television viewing and interpretation. For example, one of the girls in the study did not participate fully during the discussions of television programs other than the program viewed for the study and appeared to

be quite frustrated about this. Fingerson knew that this was based in part on the strict television-watching rules in the girl's home, which meant that she had less experience with popular television shows than did the other girls.

Also, by conducting individual interviews first, Fingerson was able to see peer power influences in the group interviews. She found that girls reflected on their own opinions and beliefs in the individual interviews but would change those beliefs in the group interviews to be more congruent with their peers. In one of the focus groups, the girls agreed that the family shown in the television program was not realistic, even though they had said the opposite in the individual interviews. The instigator, however, was Alice, who was more popular at the girls' club and more socially powerful than the other girls in this particular group. Fingerson argues that the other two girls were deferring to Alice's higher status by changing their views without introducing the contrasting views they had expressed earlier individually.

In this incident, Alice's greater status allowed her response to carry more weight in the group discussions. This points to a potential problem with group interviews —that is, the power dynamics among peers may influence the nature of their responses. Although we see this as a possible bias in group interview data, the many advantages of group interviews generally outweigh this disadvantage. In fact, many studies based on field observation data in which children are observed interacting in peer groups would have a similar disadvantage in that socially constructed knowledge often is biased in favor of more powerful peers (Adler and Adler 1998). Thus, in seeking to create the most natural contexts possible, interviewers will often need to confront naturally occurring peer power dynamics.

However, in those interview situations where researchers have a particular interest in obtaining individual, unbiased perspectives, they have the option, as Fingerson did, of including individual interviews as part of the research design. Also, researchers can interview children in groups with other classmates or schoolmates who are not part of their smaller peer groups, as long as it is possible to create such group contexts. Finally, keeping groups small in size (three or four members) further helps to minimize the influence of peer power dynamics.

It is important to reflect on the order in which individual and group interviews are conducted. In Fingerson's (1999) research, she was interested in comparing individual responses with changes emerging in group discussion. In this context, it was important that she ask the girls their individual opinions first. In other research, it may be more appropriate to conduct group interviews first. For example, in dealing with sensitive topics, such as sexuality, the body, and intimate relationships, children and adolescents may feel more comfortable in a group. This places the respondents in a position of power as they outnumber the researcher and are among their own friends and peers. Then, after a comfort level has been reached in the group and the topics have been discussed in the open, they may feel more comfortable, confident, and relaxed in a one-on-one setting with the researcher.

◆ Issues in Data Analysis

We now turn from issues of data collection to issues of data analysis. We begin by examining the many uses of sociolinguistic analysis in interviewing studies. We then follow this examination with a discussion of the importance of representing youth in their own terms.

SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW DATA

Sociolinguistic analysis can help to uncover the discourse and conversational norms of the participants in a research proj-

ect. This is all the more important when the focus of the study is on children, because children's conversational norms and patterns can differ substantially from those of adult respondents. Sociolinguistic analysis of interview data is also an important way to address the power dynamics between the researcher and participants so that the discourse styles of both are incorporated within the interview format (see Shuy, Chapter 26, this volume).

There are a number of ways in which a researcher can bring sociolinguistic analysis into an interview study. Briggs (1986) advocates the microanalysis of an interactional event (either a natural conversation or an initial informal interview) as a way to learn the communicative norms of the participants. Eder has conducted such an analysis in her current research on children's interpretations of animal teaching stories. In analyzing the first informal interview, Eder discovered that certain questions were picked up more often than others by the group of fourth- and fifth-grade students. Not only did they have many answers to these questions when first asked, but they continued to give answers to them at various points throughout the interview, suggesting that these questions were highly salient and fit into children's own modes of discourse as well.

Eder also noted that certain of her respondents could tell from changes in her pitch and pacing that a section of interviewing was about to end and she was ready to move on to the next story. They made a point of bringing up additional ideas before it was too late. Realizing that the interviewer has the power to end sequences prematurely, Eder modified her interviewing technique, asking the children for their comments and questions or telling them directly that she was about to finish a particular section, so that they would have the opportunity to express their viewpoints completely before moving on.

Another way of bringing sociolinguistic analysis into an interview study is to begin the analysis by looking at the interview itself as a communicative event (Briggs 1986; see also in this volume Schaeffer and Maynard, Chapter 28; Baker, Chapter 37). This involves first examining the communicative structure of the interview as a whole, so that the meanings of specific responses are considered in regard to the whole event. It is clear from Eder's analysis that children drew upon questions asked early in the interview to provide responses throughout the interview. They also referred back to earlier humorous or salient remarks. Thus if an interviewer wants to set a tone of informality, interest in hearing from all respondents, and interest in how they see the questions as applying to their lives, it is important that he or she introduce these discourse styles and strategies early in the interview.

Analyzing the discourse styles of respondents is also an important way of assessing the degree of rapport and validity achieved during the interview. If the dialect codes and styles of talking that respondents use during the interview are those they use with people they know well and with whom they are comfortable, the researcher can be assured that a high level of validity has been achieved. For example, in her research on Puerto Rican children, Ana Celia Zentella (1998) combined discourse analysis with individual interviews, observation, and analysis of letters. When she asked one respondent about her use of mixed languages, the girl explained:

> Depends who you're talkin' to. If you're talkin' to—if you're talkin' to someone that really understands it, it's not [incorrect], not if you know the differences. . . . Because I can speak to you mixed up because I know you [ACZ: Yeah] so I got that confidence. Now if someone I don't know, I will impress them. I'll talk the language of intelligence. [ACZ: Okay] 'Cause I know you I'll talk to you how I WANNA speak to you, 'cause I know you. Like, for exam-

ple, right now I'm talkin to you how I WANNA speak to you. [ACZ: Right] But if I don't know you, I'll give you that RESPECT. (P. 107)

Here the respondent feels free to switch dialectical codes during the interview because she knows the interviewer well and it is the mode of speaking with which she is most comfortable. She further acknowledges her ability to use a more standard code with people she does not know as well, as a way to convey respect. By discussing this topic directly, the interviewer gains further evidence that this young woman feels comfortable using her preferred mode of speech during the interview.

A researcher can also gain a sense of whether the language respondents use during an interview reflects the typical norms of their group by looking at the modes of talk they use while answering other questions in the interview. For example, in Fingerson's (1999) research, she found numerous examples of collaborative talk and many examples of playful discourse. Both modes are typical of the ways in which girls of that age develop shared knowledge and strengthen the cohesion of their groups (Eder 1988, 1995). The following is an illustration from the group members' answers to a question on how television shows compare to real family life:

Annette: Well, I think the difference between TV families and real life families if they're like TV families seem to get along really well.

Carolyn: Yeah.

Annette: Like on *Full House* or something well they always have a problem but they talk it out and then everyone goes back to being one big happy family. Heh heh.

Carolyn: Heh heh.

Annette: Real life doesn't work that way.

Carolyn: Sort of like a fairy tale, always like a happy ending, heh.

Shauna: Yeah, that's not the way it happens in my family.

Carolyn: No, heh heh.

Annette: Heh heh.

In this collaborative talk sequence, the girls build upon each other's ideas in the "cooperative overlap style" (Eder 1988). Carolyn gives supporting comments to Annette, such as "yeah," and laughs along with the previous speaker. Often in collaboration, the speakers will start with minimal comments such as "yeah" and then expand on the topic later. Carolyn's first expansion is when she talks about the television program being "like a fairy tale." Shauna then enters the discussion by agreeing and expanding. Then the other two girls laugh in shared humor about how their families do not get along as well as the TV family does. The existence of this collaborative talk suggests that the girls naturally talk about television among their peers and supports the validity of using focus groups to investigate collective interpretations of media content.

So far, we have discussed sociolinguistic analysis primarily as a way to strengthen and assess the degree of validity in interview data. However, more and more research of children's experiences is addressing *how* children develop their social knowledge as well as the content of that knowledge. This indicates that sociolinguistic analysis can be an important part of the ongoing analysis of interview data, in that it can offer insights concerning how meanings are developed and shared.

Several approaches have been suggested for how to incorporate this type of analysis into more typical interview analysis of *what* people think and believe. Jaber Gubrium and James Holstein (1997) note that one way to deal with the tension of two differ-

ent analytic focuses is through "analytic bracketing." Here, one employs one type of analysis at a time, looking either at what is being said or at how it is being accomplished.

Another approach is to examine both aspects of the analysis organized around the content of the material. In Eder's collaborative research on romantic norms among adolescent girls, the researchers examined both the content of each norm and the processes by which the norm was constructed and shared (Simon et al. 1992). In a group interview, girls discussed the norm of having romantic feelings for only one boy at a time. Although this was an emerging norm in this group of girls, it was not yet shared by all. Thus when this topic came up, their playful challenges became more serious, as can be seen in the following example:

Ellen: We were sittin' there starin' at guys at church last night, me and Hanna were, and—

Hanna: And she saw one that looked just like Craig.

Natalie: But// I was—

Ellen: I wasn't starin' at him.

Hanna: That was groaty.

Natalie: You're going with Craig.

Ellen: I know. I stared at Steve. Heh, heh.

Hanna: I know, but he looks like him in the face,

Natalie: But, um, he just—

Peg: You// go to church for a different reason than that, Ellen!

Natalie: I// get stuck on one guy.

Peg: Then you shouldn't of been there.

In this episode, the girls begin by providing mild challenges regarding Ellen's action of staring at one boy while going with another. Hanna comments, "That was groaty" (gross), and Natalie reminds Ellen that she is going with Craig. Ellen treats these challenges in a humorous manner, showing that she is not taking this violation seriously, and Hanna collaborates with Ellen by saying again that the boys look alike. Peg then offers another reason for the inappropriateness of Ellen's behavior—that it occurred in church. This is a more serious challenge to Ellen. It is immediately followed by Natalie stating the normative rule as she follows it: "I get stuck on one guy." In this episode we see how mild and strong challenges can be mixed together as girls deliberate their views on the norms of romantic love. It also shows that girls' informal discourse includes both confrontations and collaborations, often side by side. In general, this interview extract demonstrates not only the content of the girls' peer culture, but some of the communicative styles used to develop and express the norms of this culture.

REPRESENTING YOUTH IN THEIR OWN TERMS

In research on children and adolescents, there are several strategies investigators can use to give their respondents a voice. For example, Barrie Thorne (1994) uses the term *kids* to describe the participants in her research rather than *children*, which is a term only adults use. They refer to themselves as kids, so she maintains their own language and terminology in her research presentation. It is important to represent youth in their own terms in data analysis and presentation. Not only does this help maintain their power in the research interaction, but it preserves their conceptions and meanings in the analysis and text.

Another way in which a researcher can represent children in their own terms is by

actively bringing children's voices into the research project itself and any presentations of the research. This can be done through liberal use of direct quotes from interviews. Sara Shandler (1999) takes direct issue with adult representation of adolescent voices; she criticizes in particular the work of Mary Pipher (1994), who, in her best-selling book *Reviving Ophelia,* discusses adolescent girls and their difficulties with depression, eating disorders, addictions, and suicide attempts. Shandler, who wrote her book *Ophelia Speaks* while she was a high school student, argues that Pipher accurately uncovers issues of importance to Shandler and her friends, but notes her disappointment that the voices of the girls studied are not represented in Pipher's research. In response, Shandler solicited letters and essays from adolescent girls all over the United States; *Ophelia Speaks* is composed mostly of these unedited essays.

Other researchers have made conscious efforts to include participants' voices in their research presentations. Lees (1993) demonstrates her awareness of the importance of the language and discourse structures of the girls she studied through her open-ended and nondirective interview techniques as well as her liberal use of direct quotes in her book. She argues that "by focusing on the terms girls used to describe their world, and by looking across at the transcripts, light was thrown on the commonalities of the girls' lives and how individual experiences were socially structured" (p. 11). In a more direct approach, Hecht (1998) developed "radio workshops" in which the participants handled the audio recorder and asked each other questions. Then, in his analysis, he relied heavily on the children's questions as analytic categories. In general, researchers can use participants' own voices, which accurately express their views, and give them some power over the presentation of their voices as yet another way to combat the power differential inherent in the researcher-researched relationship.

◆ Conclusion

A theme throughout this chapter has been the importance of finding multiple ways of responding to the power differential between adult researchers and young participants. Some feminist researchers have come to the conclusion that regardless of any efforts a researcher makes, the researcher has the ultimate power in the interaction because he or she is the final distributor of the data and findings drawn from that data (Fonow and Cook 1991; Acker, Barry, and Esseveld 1991; Reinharz 1992). As Pamela Cotterill (1992) argues, the researcher and the researched both have power that fluctuates and shifts between the two during the interview; however, the researcher holds the final power because it is he or she who does the interpretation and presents the data to the wider world, and these data will most likely never reach the respondents or their everyday lives. The respondents are vulnerable because they have no control over the production or distribution of the research. In spite of this, we have argued that researchers can and should attempt to empower their respondents, particularly in research involving children, where there are inherent power differences between adult and child in addition to those between researcher and participant.

As Reinharz (1992) states, interviewing allows people access to the participants' ideas, thoughts, and memories using their own words, terminology, and language structure (see also Reinharz and Chase, Chapter 11, this volume). As interviewers, our goal is to learn about the participants' worlds in their own terms (Taylor and Rupp 1991). Rather than translating these words into our own language for data presentation, we should sustain the participants' language use, as it adds new perspectives and greater depth to the data and analyses. In particular, we need to let children and adolescents speak for themselves in the

data, as their language and speech are often marginalized in adult culture.

By representing our research participants in their own language and in their own terms, we can avoid viewing them as a separate "Other" (Fine 1994; Lincoln and Denzin 1994). Yvonna Lincoln and Norman Denzin (1994) argue that social science is now in a crisis of representation, with researchers asking: "Who is the Other? Can we ever hope to speak authentically of the experience of the Other, or an Other? And if not, how do we create a social science that includes the Other?" (p. 577). They argue that the answer to these questions is that, as researchers, we must include the Other in our research processes and research presentations.

Michelle Fine (1994) believes that in order to resist Othering, we need to "work the hyphen." By this she means that we must actively understand and probe our relationships with those we study. We should bring the researcher into the text and interpret the negotiated relations between the researcher and the researched to avoid seeing the researched as a distant and separate Other. Fine asserts that we must acknowledge the researcher's context, including his or her race, class, gender, and voice. Understanding these relations and placing the researcher in the data, Fine argues, will give us better data, help us to be more true to the data and the participants, and engage us in an intimacy with our research participants that will help us to be more honest in our analyses, interpretations, and data presentation.

Hood et al. (1999) ask several questions that we as researchers must think about in our endeavors: "Whose interests are served by research? For whom is it undertaken? What research methods are appropriate? How can those researched find a voice in the research process?" It is particularly important that we ask the questions of research "for what and for whom" when we are conducting research on children, as they are among the least powerful of all research participants.

In interviewing with children and adolescents, the power imbalance between interviewer and interviewee is highlighted so that it is impossible to ignore. However, much of what we have discussed in this chapter is relevant to other interview contexts as well. Although children are perhaps the least powerful Others, women, people of color, lower-class people, and those with disabilities also lack power in our society. We have drawn on the writings of feminists and people of color for insights into how to deal with the power differential of age. In turn, we believe that many of the insights gained by those who have examined age as a power factor can be applied to other situations in which there are additional power differences between researchers and participants. Indeed, all interviewers could benefit from considering these issues, because interviewers, by virtue of their role in data collection and analysis, have a power advantage over their respondents. As we have stated throughout, this advantage is most problematic when interviewers fail to recognize it and fail to adopt strategies to minimize the power imbalance. By increasing awareness of this important issue, we hope in general to promote better interview data as well as better relationships between researchers and those they study.

■ *Note*

1. In the examples of discourse data, double slashes indicate where an interruption has occurred and material in parentheses describes nonverbal and paralinguistic behaviors. All names used in the examples are pseudonyms.

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