

A person wearing a grey sweater is sitting in a wooden chair, writing on a clipboard. The clipboard has a document with blue and white text. In the background, another person is sitting in a similar chair, and a white coffee cup is on a table. The scene is dimly lit, suggesting an indoor setting like a cafe or office.

Week 13: Conducting Interviews

URBST 200 | Adjunct Lecturer: Erin Lilli | November 21, 2022



- Why might a researcher choose interviewing as a method?
- What types of interviews are there?
- What is required to conduct an interview?

Focus Groups vs. Interviews

- According to Bennett (2002), “aim of focus group work and interviews is to expose differences, contradictions and, in short, the complexity of unique experiences” (p. 151).
- Bennett identifies the key differences between interviews and focus groups:
 - Interviews usually involve the researcher and one ‘other’
 - Focus groups include the researcher and a group of people willing to take part in the study.
- Common features include:
 - The researcher working through difficult issues of power and control.
 - These are not easy methods to use – they require intrapersonal skills and time to analyze

Focus Groups

- Involve a groups of people (e.g. 5-6, could be more) that may meet more than once. They might know each other beforehand.
 - The researcher must carefully consider the makeup of the group.
 - **How might a researcher recruit participants?**
- Are often used when there are time constraints (use a lot in market research)
- Ideal for working with a community to better understand their histories and thoughts/feelings/reactions to a particular issue.
- Researcher's aim is for the groups to shape the understanding and knowledge of the issue at hand and to explore the dynamics of the focus group itself.

“It takes time for people to begin to explore beneath these well-rehearsed phrases and feelings, to acknowledge their doubts and fears about the natural environment, and to move beyond a superficial consensus towards an exploration of the diversity of environmental experiences and values within the group”.
(Burgess et al. 1988b p. 457)

Focus Groups

“Focus group work needs to be organized so that responses and discussions might rock the suppositions of the researcher, but also work within the broad themes and aims of the research without getting hijacked by other people’s agendas or turning into counselling sessions.” (Bennett, 2002, p. 153)

Interviews

- Involves the researcher and an individual, although another person or family member may be present and become part of the interview.
 - How might a researcher recruit participants?
- Interviews are usually unstructured or semi-structured and “take a conversational, fluid form, each interview varying according to the interests, experiences and views of the interviewees” (Bennett, 2002, p. 155).
 - It’s important to have an interview protocol to guide you, but also to let the interview take its course.
 - There is a balance between constricting the interviewee and letting them run away with the interview.
- The context of the interview is important.
 - Where is it being conducted?

Interviews: Power Dynamics

“Power relationships are **not fixed or unidirectional**, but shift and change according to **how the researcher and researched are interacting** with one another. **Structural inequalities** and personal differences based on class, status, age, race and sexual orientation all affect the research situation, and are played out in different ways both consciously and less consciously. Whilst many researchers are sensitive to power imbalances because of their control over the organization and dissemination of the interview and focus group, there are times when informants play up parts of their identity to make the researcher feel uncomfortable” (Bennett, 2002, p. 156).

Interviews: Power Dynamics

“Whilst interviews and focus groups can produce moments of closeness, with informants opening up to the interviewer and the interviewer seeming to do the same, the researcher is able to walk away from the research situation with her tapes and notes. The researched might not be able to walk away so easily. Ultimately, researchers need to be aware of the ways in which they play on their identity, using different facets of their experiences to engage with their informants in the best possible way.” (Bennett, 2002, p. 156).

A photograph of two women sitting at a white table in a cafe. The woman on the left is a Black woman with dark hair, wearing a white shirt, and is looking down at a notebook she is writing in with a blue pen. The woman on the right is a white woman with long dark hair, wearing a grey sweater, and is holding a glass of coffee. There is a laptop and another glass of coffee on the table. The background shows white chairs and a blurred cafe interior.

Structured, Semi-Structured & Unstructured Interviews

<http://www.indianscribes.com/preparing-qualitative-research-questions-for-an-interview/>

Preparing for an interview

Design interview questions

- Think about who you will interview
 - For Assignment #7, you can create your protocol with a specific person in mind or specific type of person (e.g. local business owner, council member, long-term resident etc.)
- Think about what kind of information you want to obtain from interviews
- Think about why you want to pursue in-depth information around your research topic

Develop an interview guide (protocol)—**you are doing this for Assignment #7**

- Introduce yourself and explain the aim of the interview
- Devise your questions so interviewees can help answer your research question
- Have a sequence to your questions / topics by grouping them in themes
- Make sure you can easily move back and forth between questions / topics
- Make sure your questions are clear and easy to understand
- Do not ask leading questions
 - What is a leading question?

Preparing for an interview

- Where will the interview be conducted?
 - Accessibility
 - Privacy
 - Comfort/Safety
 - Accommodating
 - Acoustics
- How will you record the interview? [Tips](#)
 - Audio
 - Video
 - Written
- Do you need to collect informed consent? If so, you will need to provide that document for a signature.



Tips for Conducting Interviews

1. Pick a topic that is interesting to you.
 - This is something that makes a meaningful contribution to your profile.
2. Research should guide your questions.
 - Think about your profile and what information you are gathering and analyzing about your neighborhood.
 - This will inform who you would interview and what you'd ask them.
 - You can create your protocol with a specific person in mind or specific type of person (e.g. local business owner, council member, long-term resident etc.)
3. Use a script for the beginning and end of your interview.
 - Refer to the template in Assignment #7 as a guide.

Tips for Conducting Interviews (cont.)

4. Questions should be open ended.
 - What are examples of open- and closed-ended questions?
5. Start with the basics.
6. Begin with easy to answer questions and move towards ones that are more difficult or controversial.
7. The phrase “tell me about...” is a great way to start a question.
8. Write big, expansive questions.
9. Use prompts.
10. Be willing to make “on the spot” revisions to your interview protocol.
11. Don't make the interview too long.

Class Activity: Practice Interview

- Today and Wednesday, we'll practice one-on-one, short, semi-structured interviews with a partner in class.
 - Our topic will be about **picking a college major**.
1. Draw a partner
 2. Conduct some rapid online research (10 minutes) about the topic.
 3. Develop two open-ended questions
 - Consider potential prompts, no leading questions, make the questions clear
 4. Conduct a 10-15 minute interview with you partner
 - Try an introduction and some basic questions to warm up
 - Take notes, maintain eye-contact, LISTEN!
 - Practice a concluding thank-you 😊

Sources:

- Bennett, K. “Interviews and focus groups” in P. Shurmer-Smith (Ed.). (2002). *Doing cultural geography*. SAGE.
- Burgess, J., Limb, M. and Harrison, C. (1988). “Exploring environmental values through the medium of small groups. Part Two: Illustrations of a group at work”, *Environment and Planning A*, 20: 457–76.