As we move into the 21st century, interviewing is more commonplace than ever. The number of television news programs, daytime talk shows, and newspaper articles that provide us with the results of interviews is incalculable. Internet polls beckon for our responses at every turn of the information superhighway. Considering more systematic and methodical efforts at information gathering, some estimate that interviews are involved in up to 90 percent of social science investigations (Briggs 1986). Few would dispute that interviewing is the most widely used technique for conducting systematic social inquiry; sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, psychiatrists, clinicians, administrators, politicians, and pollsters all use interviews as their "windows on the world" (Hyman et al. 1975).

Put simply, interviewing provides a way of generating empirical data about the social world by asking people to talk about their lives. In these terms, interviews are special conversations. While these conversations vary from highly structured, standardized, survey interviews, to semiformal guided conversations, to free-flowing informational exchanges, all interviews are interactional. The narratives that emerge may be as truncated as forced-choice survey responses or as elaborate as oral life histo-
ries, but they’re all constructed in situ, as a product of talk between interview participants.

The interview process itself has often been portrayed as straightforward and self-evident, even as it requires close attention to its technical execution. The interviewer coordinates a conversation designed to elicit desired information. He or she makes the initial contact, schedules the interview, designs its location, sets out the ground rules, and then questions the interviewee or “respondent.” Questions extract answers in more-or-less anticipatable format until the interviewer’s agenda is complete and the interview ends.

The respondent supplies the answers. She or he is generally aware of the routine and waits until questions are posed before answering. The respondent isn’t obliged to raise questions or run the show; that’s the interviewer’s job. The respondent simply offers information from his or her personal cache of experiential knowledge. This is a relatively passive role, one defined and delimited by the interviewer’s coordinating activity and the available repository of answers.

This scenario provides us with a familiar model of the asymmetric relationship that we recognize as interviewing. Except for technical nuances, most people are generally well-acquainted with either role in the encounter. Most of us, for example, would know what it means to interview someone and would be able to adequately manage the activity in its broad details, from start to finish. Likewise, most of us readily respond to demographic questionnaires, product-use surveys, public opinion polls, and health inventories without discernible difficulty; we’re willing and able to “dish out” all sorts of information to virtual strangers about some of the most intimate aspects of our lives. Interviews are carried out time and again with little hesitation and hardly an afterthought. The individual interview has become a ubiquitous feature of everyday life.

But as familiar as it is, interviewing is also being revolutionized. While its form and application retain many of their familiar contours, growing sensitivities to agency, authority, reflexivity, and representation are transforming the way researchers are thinking about and using interviews and their data (see, for example, Denzin and Lincoln 2000). Indeed, these heightened sensitivities have raised questions about the very possibility of assembling knowledge in heretofore conventional ways. The growing influence of poststructuralist, postmodernist, constructionist, and ethnographic sensibilities has intensified our awareness that meaning is socially constituted. We’re more cognizant than ever before that knowledge is created from the actions undertaken to obtain it (see, for example, Cicourel 1964, 1974; Garfinkel 1967). Treating interviewing as a social encounter in which knowledge is constructed means that the interview is more than a simple information-gathering operation; it’s a site of, and occasion for, producing knowledge itself.

Charles Briggs (1986), for example, argues that interviews, like all other speech events, fundamentally, not incidentally, shape the form and content of what is said. Aaron Cicourel (1974) goes farther, maintaining that interviews virtually impose particular ways of understanding reality upon subjects’ responses. The upshot is that interviewers are deeply and unavoidably implicated in creating meanings that ostensibly reside within respondents (also see Holstein and Gubrium 1995; Mishler 1986; Silverman 1993). Both parties to the interview are necessarily and unavoidably involved in this process. Meaning is not merely elicited by apt questioning, nor simply transported through respondent replies; it is actively and socially assembled in the interview encounter.

A heightened awareness of the constructedness of meaning is leading interview researchers to see their data-gathering techniques in new light. A conscious self-consciousness in relation to the research
process is providing social scientists with new lenses for viewing their own enterprise as well as the social world. While they present researchers with new realms of possibility and inquiry, these new lenses also bring new and more nuanced conceptual and methodological challenges into focus. The challenges present concerns related to virtually every aspect of the interview process.

Some of the challenges are epistemological. For example, the new lenses are focusing interview researchers on the various selves that are engaged in the interview exchange. Researchers are increasingly sensitive to the subjects who lurk behind the interview participants, and the varied roles they play in the production of knowledge. This, of course, prompts researchers to carefully theorize just who these subjects are, and how they affect the interview process. In turn, this provokes technical challenges as researchers deal with the nuances of information collection in relation to newly conceived subjects and subject positions concerning the research topics in question. Analytic challenges emerge simultaneously, as interview researchers contemplate just what their data might possibly mean and what they might make of them. Finally, concerns with how lives are represented—by interviewees as well as interview researchers—present new challenges to the ways in which knowledge might be conveyed.

The new lenses for viewing the interview process thus raise a host of new concerns, from the conceptual to the technical. They provide us with new visions of what goes on inside interviewing. But along with this new vision come complications; inside interviewing is a complex conceptual and technical environment. Gazing critically and self-consciously within, researchers have begun to tackle the seemingly endless array of new issues posed by contemporary research sensibilities. Inside Interviewing explores these complications and emerging challenges—those relating to research subjects, technical concerns, analytic options, and representational issues—by examining the complexities that new lenses have revealed. We begin this chapter with a look back at the development of contemporary perspectives on the interview, then proceed through some important ramifications of a renewed look inside the contemporary interview.

Developing Sensibilities

As familiar as it seems today, the interview, as a procedure for securing knowledge, is relatively new historically. Indeed, individuals have not always been viewed as important sources of knowledge about their own experience. Of course, we can imagine that particular forms of questioning and answering have been with us since the beginning of talk. As long as parental authority has existed, for example, fathers and mothers have undoubtedly questioned their children regarding their whereabouts; children have been expected to provide answers, not questions, in response. Similarly, suspects and prisoners have been interrogated for as long as suspicion and incarceration have been a part of human affairs. Healers, priests, employers, journalists, and many others seeking immediate, practical knowledge about everyday life have all undertaken interview like activity.

Nevertheless, not so long ago it would have seemed rather peculiar for an individual to approach a complete stranger and ask for permission to discuss personal matters. Daily life was more intimate; everyday business was conducted on a face-to-face basis between persons who were well acquainted with one another. According to Mark Benney and Everett Hughes (1956), there was a time when the interview simply didn’t exist as a social form; they noted more than 40 years ago that “the interview [as we now refer to it] is a relatively new kind of encounter in the history of human relations” (p. 139). Benney and Hughes were not saying that the activity of asking and answering questions was new, but
rather that information gathering did not always rely upon the interview encounter. Although centuries ago a father might have interrogated his children concerning their whereabouts, this was not interviewing as we have come to know it today. The interview emerged only when specific information-gathering roles were formalized. This encounter would hardly be recognizable in a world of close relationships where the stranger was more likely to signify danger and the unknown than to be understood as a neutral conduit for the transmission of personal knowledge (Benney and Hughes 1956).

MODERN INTERVIEWING

The modern interview changed all of this. Especially after World War II, with the emergence of the standardized survey interview, individuals became accustomed to offering information and opinions that had no immediate bearing on their lives and social relations. Individuals could forthrightly add their thoughts and feelings to the mix of “public opinion.” Indeed, it became feasible for the first time for individuals to speak with strangers about all manner of thoughts concerning their lives, because these new strangers (that is, interviewers) didn’t tell, at least in personally recognizable terms. Individuals—no matter how insignificant they might seem in the everyday scheme of things—came to be viewed as important elements of populations. Each person had a voice and it was imperative that each voice be heard, at least in principle. Seeking everyone’s opinions, the interview has increasingly democratized experiential information.

David Riesman and Benney (1956) considered the interview format to be the product of a changing world of relationships, one that developed rapidly following the war years. The new era gradually accepted routine conversational exchanges between strangers; when people encountered interview situations, they were not immediately defensive about being asked for information about their lives, their associates, or their deepest sentiments, even though, in certain quarters, defensiveness was understandable because of perceived linkages between interviewing and oppression. Within this world, we have come to recognize easily two new roles associated with talking about oneself and one’s life with strangers: the role of the interviewer and the role of the respondent—the centerpieces of the familiar interview.

This is an outgrowth of what Riesman and Benney called “the modern temper,” a term that we take to have both cultural and interpersonal resonances. Culturally, it denotes a shared understanding that the individual has the wherewithal to offer a meaningful description of, or set of opinions about, his or her life. Individuals, in their own right, are accepted as significant commentators on their own experience; it is not just the “chief” community commentator who speaks for one and all, in other words, or the local representative of the commonwealth whose opinions are taken to express the thoughts and feelings of every mind and heart in the vicinity.

This modern temper is also interpersonal, in that it democratizes the interpretation of experience by providing a working space and means for expressing public opinion. Everyone—each individual—is taken to have significant views and feelings about life that are accessible to others who undertake to ask about them. As William James ([1892] 1961) noted at the end of the 19th century, this assumes that each and every individual has a sense of self that is owned and controlled by him- or herself, even if the self is socially formulated and interpersonally responsive. This self makes it possible for everyone to reflect meaningfully on individual experience and to enter into socially relevant dialogue about it. The modern temper has made it reasonable and acceptable to turn to a world of individuals, most of whom are likely to be strangers, as a way of understanding the social organization of experience.
Just as the interview itself is a recent development, the selection of ordinary individuals as sources of information and opinions is also relatively new (see Kent 1981; Oberschall 1965; Selvin 1985). As Pertti Alasuutari (1998) explains, it was not so long ago that when one wanted to know something important about society or social life, one invariably asked those considered to be "in the know." In contrast to what seems self-evident today—that is, questioning those individuals whose experiences are under consideration—the obvious and efficient choice for very early interviewers was to ask informed citizens to provide answers to their questions. Alasuutari provides an example from Anthony Oberschall's work:

> It was natural that the questions were posed to knowledgeable citizens, such as state officials or church ministers. In other words, they were informants in expert interviews. For instance, in a survey of agricultural laborers conducted in 1874-1875 in Germany (Oberschall 1965: 19-20), question No. 25 read: "Is there a tendency among laborers to save money in order to be able to buy their own plot of land later on? Does this tendency appear already among the unmarried workers or only after marriage?" . . . The modern survey would of course approach such questions quite differently. Instead of asking an informed person whether married or unmarried workers have a tendency to save money to buy their own plot of land, a sample of workers would be asked about their marital status, savings, and plans about how to use them. (Pp. 135-36)

Those considered to be knowledgeable in the subject matter under consideration, Alasuutari notes, were viewed as informants, not respondents, the latter being superfluous under the circumstances.

**INDIVIDUALIZING KNOWLEDGE**

The research consequence of the subsequent democratization of opinion was part of a trend toward increased surveillance in everyday life. The growing discourse of individuality combined with an increasingly widespread and efficient apparatus for information processing. Although interviewing and the resulting production of public opinion developed rapidly after World War II, the widespread surveillance of daily life and the deployment of the category of the individual had begun centuries earlier.

Michel Foucault's (1973, 1975, 1977, 1978) iconoclastic studies of the discursive organization of subjectivity shed fascinating light on the development of the concepts of the personal self and individuality. Time and again, in institutional contexts ranging from the medical clinic and the asylum to the prison, Foucault shows us how what he calls "technologies of the self" have transformed the way we view the sources and structure of our subjectivity (see Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982; Foucault 1988).

We use the term *subjectivity* here to indicate the type(s) of subject(s) that individuals and cultures might comprehend and embody. With respect to the interview, we are referring to the putative agent who stands behind the "facades" of interview participants, so to speak, the agent who is held practically and morally responsible for the participants' words and actions. Most of us are so familiar with the contemporary Western image of the individualized self as this agent that we find it difficult to comprehend alternative subjectivities. Clifford Geertz (1984), however, points out that this is "a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures" (p. 126). In other societies and historical periods, agency and responsibility have been articulated in relation to a variety of other social structures, such as the tribe, the clan, the lineage, the family, the community, and the monarch. The notion of the bounded, unique self, more or less integrated as the
center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action, is a very recent version of the subject.

Foucault offers us new insights into how this sense of subjectivity evolved. Technologies of the self, in Foucault’s terms, are the concrete, socially and historically located institutional practices through which a relatively new sense of who and what we are as human beings was constructed. These practices advanced the notion that each and every one of us has an ordinary self—the idea being that each one could acceptably reflect on his or her individual experience, personally describe it, and communicate opinions about it and its surrounding world in his or her own terms. This transformed our sense of human beings as subjects. The now self-evident view that each of us has opinions of public significance became intelligible only within a discourse of individuality.

Foucault argues that the newly formed technologies of surveillance of the 18th and 19th centuries, the quintessential manifestation of which was Jeremy Bentham’s all-seeing panopticon, did not just incorporate and accommodate the experiences of individual subjects who populated the contemporary social landscape, but, instead, entered into the construction of individual subjects in their own right. Foucault poignantly exemplifies this transformation in the opening pages of *Discipline and Punish* (1977), a book that is as much about the individuation of society as it is about “the birth of the prison” (its subtitle). In the opening pages, we cringe at a vivid account of the torture of a man condemned to death for attempting to assassinate King Louis XV of France. We despair as the man’s body is flayed, burned, and drawn and quartered in public view. From contemporary commentary, Foucault (1977) describes the events:

On 2 March 1757 Damiens the regicide was condemned “to make the *amende honorable* before the main door of the Church of Paris,” where he was to be “taken and conveyed in a cart wearing nothing but a shirt, holding a torch of burning wax weighing two pounds”; then, “in the said cart, to the Place de Grève, where, on a scaffold that will be erected there, the flesh will be torn from his breasts, arms, thighs and calves with red-hot pincers, his right hand, holding the knife with which he committed the said parricide, burnt with sulphur, and, on those places where the flesh will be torn away, poured molten lead, boiling oil, burning resin, wax and sulphur melted together and then his body drawn and quartered by four horses and his limbs and body consumed by fire, reduced to ashes and his ashes thrown to the winds.” (P. 3)

Foucault asks why criminals were subjected to such horrible bodily torture. Why were they made to beg for forgiveness in public spectacles? His answer is that the spectacle of torture was an event whose political culture was informed by a sense of the seamless relations among the body of the king (the crown), social control, and subjectivity. As all people were, Damiens was conceived literally and legally as a subject of the king; his body and soul were inseparable extensions of the crown. An assault on the body of the king had to be attacked in turn, as a red-hot iron might be used to cauterize a festering wound. The spectacle of torture did not revolve around an autonomous agent who was regarded as an independent subject with a self, feelings, opinions, and experiential reality uniquely his own. This might have caused others sympathetically to consider Damiens’s treatment to be cruel and unusual punishment, to put it in today’s terms.

The disposition of the times, however, offered no sympathy for what Damiens might have been “going through.” In the eyes of others, Damiens’s feelings and opinions had no standing apart from the man’s station in relation to the sovereign. The spectacle of punishment rested on a discourse of knowledge and power that
lodged all experiential truth in the sovereign’s shared embodiment. As Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (1982) explain: “The figure of torture brings together a complex of power, truth, and bodies. The atrocity of torture was an enactment of power that also revealed truth. Its application on the body of the criminal was an act of revenge and an art” (p. 146). The idea that a thinking, feeling, consequential subject occupied the body of the criminal was simply beyond the pale of contemporary understanding. Individuality, as we know it today, did not exist as a recognizable social form.

A few pages later in Discipline and Punish, Foucault presents the new subject who comes into being as part of a discourse that is more in tune with the modern temper. Discussing the evolution of penal reform, he describes the emergence of the “house of young prisoners” in Paris a mere 80 years after Damien’s death. Torture as a public spectacle has gradually disappeared. The “gloomy festival of punishment” is dying out, along with the accused’s agonizing plea for pardon. It has been replaced by a humanizing regimen, informed by a discourse of the independent, thinking subject whose criminality is correctable. Rehabilitation is replacing retribution. Scientific methods of scrutiny and courses of instruction are viewed as the means for returning the criminal to right reason and back to the proper fold of society. The subject is no longer a selfless appendage of a larger entity; this is a new agent, one with a mind and sentiments of his or her own. With the proper regimen, this new agent is incited to individual self-scrutiny and responds to corrective action.

In time, this same subject would duly offer his or her opinions and sentiments within the self-scrutinizing regimens of what Foucault calls “governmentality,” the archipelago of surveillance practices suffusing modern life. As James Miller (1993: 299) points out, governmentality extends well beyond the political and penal to include pedagogical, spiritual, and religious dimensions (see also Garland 1997). If Bentham’s original panopticon was an efficient form of prison observation, panopticism in the modern temper becomes the widespread self-scrutiny that “governs” all aspects of everyday life in the very commonplace questions and answers posed about ourselves in both our inner thoughts and our public expressions. These are seemingly daily inquiries about what we personally think and feel about every conceivable topic, including our deepest sentiments and most secret actions.

We can readily view the individual interview as part of modern governmentality, impressed upon us by myriad inquiries into our lives. Indeed, the interview may be seen as one of the 20th century’s most distinctive technologies of the self. In particular, it gives an “objective,” “scientific” cast to the notion of the individual self, terms of reference that resolutely echo modern times. As Nikolas Rose (1990, 1997) has shown in the context of the psychological sciences, the private self, along with its descriptive data, was invented right along with the technologies we now associate with measurement.

“Scientific surveillance” such as psychological testing, case assessments, and, of course, individual interviews of all kinds have created the experiencing and informing respondent we now take for granted. The category of “the person” now identifies the self-reflective constituents of society (see Carrithers, Collins, and Lukes 1985; Lidz 1976); if we want to know what the social world is like, we now ask its individual inhabitants. The individual interview on a personal scale and the social survey on the societal level serve as democratizing agents, giving voice to individuals and, in the process, formulating public knowledge and opinion.

**LEARNING FROM STRANGERS**

points to the shared expectations that surround the face-to-face experience of interviewing, as the book lays out "the art and method of qualitative interview studies." Although qualitative interviews especially are sometimes conducted with acquaintances, much of Weiss's advice on how an interviewer should proceed is based on the premise that the interviewer does not know the respondent. Behind each bit of advice about how to interview effectively is the understanding that each and every stranger-respondent is someone worth listening to. The respondent is someone who can provide detailed descriptions of his or her thoughts, feelings, and activities, if the interviewer asks and listens carefully enough. The trick, in Weiss's judgment, is for the interviewer to present a caring and concerned attitude, expressed within a well-planned and encouraging format. The aim of the interviewer is to derive, as objectively as possible, the respondent's own opinions of the subject matter in question, information that the respondent will readily offer and elaborate when the circumstances are conducive to his or her doing so and the proper methods are applied.

The full range of individual knowledge is potentially accessible, according to Weiss; the interview is a virtual window on experience, a kind of universal panopticon. In answering the question of why we interview, Weiss offers a compelling portrayal of the acquisition of knowledge:

Interviewing gives us access to the observations of others. Through interviewing we can learn about places we have not been and could not go and about settings in which we have not lived. If we have the right informants, we can learn about the quality of neighborhoods or what happens in families or how organizations set their goals. Interviewing can inform us about the nature of social life. We can learn about the work of occupations and how people fashion careers, about cultures and the values they sponsor, and about the challenges people confront as they lead their lives.

We can learn also, through interviewing, about people's interior experiences. We can learn what people perceived and how they interpreted their perceptions. We can learn how events affect their thoughts and feelings. We can learn the meanings to them of their relationships, their families, their work, and their selves. We can learn about all the experiences, from joy through grief, that together constitute the human condition. (P. 1)

The opportunities for knowing even strangers by way of their opinions are now ubiquitous. We find interviews virtually everywhere. We have come a very long way from the days when individuals' experiences and voices simply didn't matter, a long way from Damiens's "unheard" cries. The interview itself has created, as well as tapped into, the vast world of individual experience and knowledge that now constitutes the substance of everyday life.

♦ The Mediation of Contemporary Life

Interviewing of all kinds mediates contemporary life. Think of how much we learn about today's world by way of interviews conducted across a broad spectrum of venues, well beyond research practice. Interviews, for example, are a source of popular celebrity and notoriety. Television interview host Larry King introduces us to politicians and power brokers who not only share their thoughts, feelings, and opinions with a mass audience but cultivate their celebrity status in the process. This combines with programming devoted to exposing the deepest personal, not just political or social, sentiments of high-profile figures. Celebrity news commentators/ interviewers like Barbara Walters plumb the emotional
depths of stars and pundits from across the media spectrum. To this, add the likes of talk-show hosts Oprah Winfrey, Montel Williams, Jenny Jones, and Jerry Springer, who daily invite ordinary men and women, the emotionally tortured, and the behaviorally bizarre to “spill their guts” in front of millions of television viewers. Referring to all of these, the interview is becoming the experiential conduit par excellence of the electronic age. And this is only the tip of the iceberg, as questions and answers fly back and forth on the Internet, where chat rooms are now as intimate as back porches and bedrooms.

The ubiquity and significance of the interview in our daily lives has prompted David Silverman (1997) to suggest that “perhaps we all live in what might be called an ‘interview society,’ in which interviews seem central to making sense of our lives” (p. 248; see also Silverman 1993). Silverman (1997) identifies three conditions required by an interview society. First, an interview society requires a particular informing subjectivity, “the emergence of the self as a proper object of narration.” Societies with forms of collective or cosmic subjectivity, for example, do not provide the practical basis for learning from strangers. This is possible only in societies where there is a prevalent and shared sense that any individual has the potential to be a respondent and, as such, has something meaningful to offer when asked to do so.

Second, Silverman points to the need for an information-gathering apparatus he calls the “technology of the confessional.” In other words, an interview society needs a practical means for securing the communicative by-product of “confession.” This, Silverman (1997) points out, should commonly extend to friendship not only “with the policeman, but with the priest, the teacher, and the ‘psy’ professional” (p. 248).

Third, and perhaps most important, an interview society requires that a mass technology be readily available. An interview society is not the product of the age-old medical interview, or of the long-standing practice of police interrogation; rather, it requires that an interviewing establishment be recognizably in place throughout society. Virtually everyone should be familiar with the goals of interviewing as well as what it takes to conduct an interview.

Silverman argues that many contemporary societies have met these conditions, some more than others. The mass media, human service professionals, and researchers all rely extensively on interviews. Internet surveys now provide instant questions and answers about every imaginable subject; we are asked to state our inclinations and opinions regarding everything from presidential candidates to which characters on TV serials should be retained or ousted. The interview society, it seems, has firmly arrived, is well, and is flourishing as a leading context for addressing the subjective contours of daily living.

It would therefore be a mistake to treat the interview as simply a research procedure. The interview is part and parcel of our society and culture. It is not just a way of obtaining information about who and what we are; it is now an integral, constitutive feature of our everyday lives. Indeed, it is at the very heart of what we have become and could possibly be as individuals.

**The Subjects Behind Interview Participants**

In a society replete with interviews, increasing concern with individual experience has prompted a corresponding awareness of the various subjects who populate the interview encounter (see Holstein and Gubrium 1995). Recently, researchers have begun to explore inside the interview, seeking answers to myriad new questions: What does it mean to be an interviewer? What does it mean to be a respondent? What do participants presume about one another, and the interview process itself? From where does
knowledge emerge, and whose knowledge is it anyway? These are but a few of the challenges and complexities that new lenses on interviewing have revealed.

Let's begin to unpack some of these complications by examining competing visions of the subjects who are imagined to stand behind interview participants. Regardless of the type of interview, there is always a working model of the subject lurking behind the persons assigned the roles of interviewer and respondent (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). By virtue of the kinds of subjects we project, we confer varying senses of epistemological agency upon interviewers and respondents. These, in turn, influence the ways we proceed technically, as well as our understanding of the relative validity of the information that is produced.

As we noted at the outset, interviewing typically has been viewed as an asymmetrical encounter in which an interviewer solicits information from an interviewee, who relatively passively responds to the interviewer's inquiries. This commonsensical, if somewhat oversimplified, view suggests that those who want to find out about another person's feelings, thoughts, or activities merely have to ask the right questions and the other's "reality" will be revealed. Studs Terkel, the legendary journalistic and sociological interviewer, makes the process sound elementary; he claims that he merely turns on his tape recorder and asks people to talk. Using his classic study Working (1972) as an example, Terkel claims that his questions merely evoke responses that interviewees are all too ready to share:

There were questions, of course. But they were casual in nature . . . the kind you would ask while having a drink with someone; the kind he would ask you . . . In short, it was a conversation. In time, the sluice gates of damned up hurts and dreams were open. (I: xxv)

As unsophisticated and guileless as it sounds, this image is common in interviewing practice. The image is one of "mining" or "prospecting" for the facts and feelings residing within the respondent. Of course, a highly sophisticated technology tells researcher/prospectors how to ask questions, what sorts of questions not to ask, the order in which to ask them, and ways to avoid saying things that might spoil, contaminate, or bias the data. The basic model, however, locates valued information inside the respondent and assigns the interviewer the task of somehow extracting it.

THE PASSIVE SUBJECT BEHIND THE RESPONDENT

In this rather conventional view, the subjects behind respondents are basically conceived as passive vessels of answers for experiential questions put to them by interviewers. Subjects are repositories of facts, feelings, and the related particulars of experience. They hold the answers to demographic questions, such as age, gender, race, occupation, and socioeconomic status. They contain information about social networks, including household composition, friendship groups, circles of care, and other relationships. These repositories also hold a treasure trove of experiential data pertinent to beliefs, feelings, and activities.

The vessel-like subject behind the respondent passively possesses information the interviewer wants to know; the respondent merely conveys, for better or worse, what the subject already possesses. Occasionally, such as with sensitive interview topics or with recalcitrant respondents, interviewers acknowledge that the task may be especially difficult. Nonetheless, the information is viewed, in principle, as the uncontaminated contents of the subject's vessel of answers. The knack is to formulate questions and provide an atmosphere conducive to open and undistorted communication between interviewer and respondent.

Much of the methodological literature on interviewing deals with the facets of
these intricate matters. The vessel-of-answers view leads interviewers to be careful in how they ask questions, lest their method of inquiry bias what lies within the subject. This perspective has prompted the development of myriad procedures for obtaining unadulterated facts and details, most of which rely upon interviewer and question neutrality. Successful implementation of disinterested practices elicits objective truths from the vessel of answers. Validity results from the successful application of these techniques.

In the vessel-of-answers model, the image of the subject is not of an agent engaged in the production of knowledge. If the interviewing process goes "by the book" and is nondirectional and unbiased, respondents can validly proffer information that subjects presumably merely store within. Contamination emanates from the interview setting, its participants, and their interaction, not from the subject, who, under ideal conditions, is capable of providing accurate, authentic reports.

THE PASSIVE SUBJECT BEHIND THE INTERVIEWER

This model of the respondent evokes a complementary model of the subject behind the interviewer. Although not totally passive, the interviewer/subject nonetheless stands apart from the actual "data" of the field; he or she merely collects what is already there. To be sure, the collection process can be arduous, but the objective typically is to tap into information without unduly disturbing—and, therefore, biasing or contaminating—the respondent's vessel of answers. If it is not quite like Terkel's "sluice gates" metaphor, it still resembles turning on a spigot; the interviewer's role is limited to releasing what is already in place.

The interviewer, for example, is expected to keep the respondent's vessel of answers in plain view but to avoid shaping the information that is extracted. Put simply, this involves the interviewer's control-ling him- or herself so as not to influence what the passive interview subject will communicate. The interviewer must discard serious self-consciousness; the interviewer must avoid any action that would imprint his or her presence onto the respondent's reported experience. The interviewer must resist supplying particular frames of reference for the respondent's answers. To the extent such frameworks appropriately exist, they are viewed as embedded in the subject's world behind the respondent, not behind the researcher. If the interviewer is to be at all self-conscious, this is technically limited to his or her being alert to the possibility that he or she may be contaminating or otherwise unduly influencing the research process.

Interviewers are generally expected to keep their "selves" out of the interview process. Neutrality is the byword. Ideally, the interviewer uses his or her interpersonal skills merely to encourage the expression of, but not to help construct, the attitudes, sentiments, and information in question. In effect, the image of the passive subject behind the interviewer is one of a facilitator. As skilled as the interviewer might be in practice, all that he or she appropriately does in principle is to promote the expression of the actual attitudes and information that lie in waiting in the respondent's vessel of answers.

In exerting control in this way, the interviewer limits his or her involvement in the interview to a specific preordained role—which can be quite scripted—that is constant from one interview to another. Should the interviewer go out of control, so to speak, and introduce anything but variations on specified questions into the interview, the passive subject behind the interviewer is methodologically violated and neutrality is compromised. It is not this passive subject who is the problem, but rather the interviewer who has not adequately regulated his or her conduct so as to facilitate the expression of respondent information.
Empowering Respondents

New lenses on what it means to interview and to analyze interview material have led to far-reaching innovations in research (see Riessman, Chapter 16; Cándida Smith, Chapter 17; Ellis and Berger, Chapter 23). They have also promoted the view that the interview society is not only the by-product of statistically summarized survey data, but is constituted by all manner of alternative interview encounters and information, the diverse agendas of which variably enter into “data” production. In the process, the political dimensions of the interview process have been critically underscored (see Briggs, Chapter 24, this volume).

The respondent’s voice has taken on particular urgency, as we can hear in Eliot Mishler’s (1986) poignant discussion of the empowerment of interview respondents. Uncomfortable with the evolution of the interview into a highly controlled, asymmetrical conversation dominated by the researcher (see Kahn and Cannell 1957; Maccoby and Maccoby 1954), Mishler challenges the assumptions and implications behind the “standardized” interview. His aim is to bring the respondent more fully and actively into the picture, to make the respondent more of an equal partner in the interview conversation.

Following a critique of standardized interviewing, Mishler (1986) offers a lengthy discussion of his alternative perspective, one that questions the need for strict control of the interview encounter. The approach, in part, echoes our discussion of the activation of interview participants. Mishler suggests that rather than conceiving of the interview as a form of stimulus and response, we might better view it as an interactional accomplishment. Noting that interview participants not only ask and answer questions in interviews but simultaneously engage in other speech activities, Mishler turns our attention to what the participants, in effect, are doing with words when they engage each other. He makes the point this way:

Defining interviews as speech events or speech activities, as I do, marks the fundamental contrast between the standard antilingualistic, stimulus-response model and an alternative approach to interviewing as discourse between speakers. Different definitions in and of themselves do not constitute different practices. Nonetheless, this new definition alerts us to the features of interviews that hitherto have been neglected. (Pp. 35-36)

The key phrase here is “discourse between speakers.” Mishler directs us to the integral and inexorable speech activities in which even survey interview participants engage as they ask and answer questions (see Schaeffer and Maynard, Chapter 11, this volume). Informed by a conversation-analytic perspective (see Sacks 1992; Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974), he points to the discursive machinery apparent in interview transcripts. Highlighting evidence of the ways the interviewer and the respondent mutually monitor each other’s speech exchanges, Mishler shows how the participants ongoingly and jointly construct in words their senses of the developing interview agenda. He notes, for example, that even token responses by the interviewer, such as “Hm hm,” can serve as confirmatory markers that the respondent is on the “right” track for interview purposes. But, interestingly enough, not much can be done to eliminate token responses, given that a fundamental rule of conversational exchange is that turns must be taken in the unfolding interview process. To eliminate tokens or to refuse to take one’s turn, however minimally, is, in effect, to stop the conversation, hence the interview. The dilemma here is striking in that it points to the practical need for interview participants to be linguistically animated, not just standardized and passive, in order to complete the interview conversation.
It goes without saying that this introduces us to a pair of subjects behind the interviewer and the respondent who are more conversationally active than standardization would imply, let alone tolerate. Following a number of conversation-analytic and linguistic arguments (Cicourel 1967, 1982; Gumperz 1982; Hymes 1967; Sacks et al. 1974), Mishler (1986) explains that each and every point in the series of speech exchanges that constitute an interview is, in effect, open to interactional work, activity that constructs communicative sense out of the participants as well as the subject matter under consideration. Thus, in contrast to the modeled asymmetry of the standardized interview, there is considerable communicative equality and interdependence in the speech activities of all interviewing, where participants invariably engage in the “joint construction of meaning,” no matter how asymmetrical the informing model might seem.

The discourse of the interview is jointly constructed by interviewer and respondent. . . . Both questions and responses are formulated, developed through, and shaped by the discourse between interviewers and respondents. . . . An adequate understanding of interviews depends on recognizing how interviewers reframe questions and how respondents frame answers in terms of their reciprocal understanding as meanings emerge during the course of an interview. (p. 52)

**THE ISSUE OF “OWNING” NARRATIVE**

Mishler’s entry into the linguistic and conversation-analytic fray was fundamentally motivated by his desire to valorize the respondent’s perspective and experience. This was, to some extent, a product of Mishler’s long-standing professional interest in humanizing the doctor-patient encounter. His earlier book *The Discourse of Medicine: Dialectics of Medical Interviews* (1984) is important in that it shows how medical interviews can unwittingly but systematically abrogate the patient’s sense of his or her own illness even in the sincerest doctor’s search for medical knowledge. As an alternative, Mishler advocates more open-ended questions, minimal interruptions of patient accounts, and the use of patients’ own linguistic formulations to encourage their own articulations of illness. Similarly, in the context of the research interview, Mishler urges us to consider ways that interviewing might be designed so that the respondent’s voice comes through in greater detail, as a way of paying greater attention to respondent relevancies.

According to Mishler, this turns us forthrightly to respondents’ stories. His view is that experience comes to us in the form of narratives. When we communicate our experiences to each other, we do so by storytelling them. When, in turn, we encourage elaboration, we commonly use such narrative devices as “Go on” and “Then what happened?” to prompt further story-like communication. It would be difficult to imagine how an experience of any kind could be conveyed except in narrative format, in terms that structure events into distinct plots, themes, and forms of characterization. Consequently, according to this view, we must leave our research efforts open to respondents’ stories if we are to understand respondents’ experiences in, and on, their own terms, leading to less formal control in the interview process.

Applied to the research interview, the “radical transformation of the traditional approach to interviewing” (Mishler 1986: 117) serves to empower respondents. This resonates with a broadening concern with what is increasingly referred to as the respondent’s own voice or authentic story. Although *story, narrative,* and the respondent’s voice are the leading terms of reference, an equally key, yet unexplicated, usage is the term *own.* It appears throughout Mishler’s discussion of empowerment, yet he gives it hardly any attention.
Consider several applications of the term *own* in Mishler’s (1986) research interviewing text. In introducing a chapter titled “The Empowerment of Respondents,” he writes, “I will be concerned primarily with the impact of different forms of practice on respondents’ modes of understanding themselves and the world, on the possibility of their acting in terms of their own interests, on social scientists’ ways of working and theorizing, and the social functions of scientific knowledge” (pp. 117-18; emphasis added). Further along, Mishler explains, “Various attempts to restructure the interviewee-interviewer relationship so as to empower respondents are designed to encourage them to find and speak in their own ‘voices’” (p. 118; emphasis added).

Finally, in pointing to the political potential of narrative, Mishler boldly flags the ownership in question: “To be empowered is not only to speak in one’s own voice and to tell one’s own story, but to apply the understanding arrived at to action in accord with one’s own interests” (p. 119; emphasis added).

Mishler is admittedly being persuasive. Just as in his earlier book on medical interviews he encourages what Michael Balint (1964) and others (see Silverman 1987) have come to call patient-centered medicine, in his research interview book he advocates what might be called respondent-centered research. Mishler constructs a preferred version of the subject behind the respondent, one that allegedly gives voice to the respondent’s own story. The image is one of a respondent who owns his or her experience, who, on his or her own, can narrate the story if given the opportunity. It is a story that is uniquely the respondent’s in that only his or her own voice can articulate it authentically; any other voice or format would apparently detract from what this subject behind the respondent more genuinely and competently does on his or her own. Procedurally, the point is to provide the narrative opportunity for this ownership to be expressed, to reveal what presumably lies within.

But valorizing the individual’s ownership of his or her story is a mere step away from seeing the subject as a vessel of answers. As we discussed earlier, this subject is passive and, wittingly or not, taken to be a mere repository of information, opinion, and sentiment. More subtly, perhaps, the subject behind the respondent who “owns” his or her story is viewed as virtually possessing what we seek to know about. Mishler’s advice is that we provide respondents with the opportunity to convey these stories to us on their own terms rather than deploy predesignated categories or other structured formats for doing so. This, Mishler claims, empowers respondents.

Nevertheless, the passive vessel of answers is still there in its essential detail. It is now more deeply embedded in the subject, perhaps, but it is as passively secured in the inner reaches of the respondent as the vessel informing the survey respondent’s subjectivity. We might say that the subject behind the standardized interview respondent is a highly rationalized version of the romanticized subject envisioned by Mishler, one who harbors his or her own story. Both visions are rhetorics of subjectivity that have historically been used to account for the “truths” of experience. Indeed, we might say that the standardized interview produces a different narrative of experience than does the empowered interviewing style that Mishler and others advocate. This is not meant to disparage, but only to point out that when the question of subjectivity is raised, the resulting complications of the interview are as epistemological as they are invidious.

It is important to emphasize that the ownership in question results from a preferred subjectivity, not from an experiential subject that is more essential than all other subjects. It is, as Silverman and his associates remind us, a romanticized discourse of its own and, although it has contributed immensely to our understanding of the variety of “others” we can be, it does not empower absolutely (see Silverman 1987, 1993; Atkinson and Silverman 1997). Rather, it
empowers in relation to the kinds of stories that one can ostensibly own, that would seem to be genuine, or that are otherwise accountably recognized as fitting or authentic to oneself in the particular times and places they are conveyed.

A DISCOURSE OF EMPOWERMENT

Invoking a discourse of empowerment is a way of giving both rhetorical and practical spin to how we conduct interviews. Like all discourses, the discourse of individual empowerment deploys preferred terms of reference. For example, in the discourse of the standardized survey interview, the interview encounter is asymmetrical and the operating principle is control. Participants have different functions: one side asks questions and records information, and the other side provides answers to the questions asked. Procedurally, the matter of control is centered on keeping these functions and their roles separate. Accordingly, an important operating rule is that the interviewer does not provide answers or offer opinions. Conversely, the respondent is encouraged to answer questions, not ask them. Above all, the language of the enterprise locates knowledge within the respondent, but control rests with the interviewer.

The terms of reference change significantly when the interview is more symmetrical or, as Mishler puts it, when the respondent is empowered. The interviewer and respondent are referred to jointly as interview participants, highlighting their collective contribution to the enterprise. This works against asymmetry, emphasizing a more fundamental sense of the shared task at hand, which now becomes a form of “collaboration” in the production of meaning. One procedure for setting this tone is to make it clear that all participants in the interview can effectively raise questions related to the topics under consideration. Equally important, everyone should understand that answers are not meant to be conclusive but instead serve to further the agenda for discussion. The result, then, is more of a team effort, rather than a division of labor, even though the discourse of empowerment still aims to put the narrative ball in the respondent’s court, so to speak.

Assiduously concerned with the need to “redistribute power” in the interview encounter, Mishler (1986) argues compellingly for the more equalized relationship he envisions. Seeking a redefinition of roles, he describes what he has in mind:

These types of role redefinitions may be characterized briefly by the following terms referring respectively to the relationship between interviewee and interviewer as informant and reporter, as research collaborators, and as learner/actor and advocate. Taking on the roles of each successive pair in this series involves a more comprehensive and more radical transformation of the power relationship inherent in traditional roles, and each succeeding pair of roles relies on and absorbs the earlier one. (Pp. 122-23)

The use of the prefix co- is commonplace in such discussions, further signaling symmetry. Participants often become “coparticipants” and, of course, the word collaboration speaks for itself in this context. Some authors even refer to the interview encounter as a “conversational partnership” (Rubin and Rubin 1995).

Mishler’s discourse of collaboration and empowerment extends to the representation of interview material, taking co- into new territory. In discussing the role of the advocate, for instance, Mishler describes Kai Erikson’s (1976) activity as a researcher hired by attorneys representing the residents affected by the 1972 dam collapse in the Buffalo Creek valley of West Virginia. Erikson was advocating for the surviving residents, several of whom he interviewed, but not the local coal company from which they were seeking damages. The researcher and the sponsor clearly collaborated with
each other in representing interview materials. Others are not as forthrightly political in their corepresentations. Laurel Richardson (2002), for example, discusses alternative textual choices in relation to the presentation of the respondent’s “own” story. Research interviews, she reminds us, are usually conducted for research audiences. Whether they are closed- or open-ended, the questions and answers are formulated with the analytic interests of researchers in mind. Sociologists, for example, may wish to consider how gender, race, or class background shapes respondents’ opinions, so they will tailor questions and interpret answers in these terms. Ultimately, researchers will represent interview material in the frameworks and languages of their research concerns and in disciplinary terms. But, as Richardson points out, respondents might not figure that their experiences or opinions are best understood that way. Additionally, Richardson asks us whether the process of coding interview responses for research purposes itself disenfranchises respondents, transforming their narratives into terms foreign to what their original sensibilities might have been (see also Briggs, Chapter 24, this volume).

Richardson suggests that a radically different textual form can help us to represent the respondent’s experience more inventively, and authentically. Using poetry rather than prose, for example, capitalizes on poetry’s culturally understood role of evoking and making meaning, not just conveying it. This extends to poetry’s alleged capacity to communicate meaning where prose is said to be inadequate, in the way that folk poetry is used in some quarters to represent the ineffable (see Gubrium 1988). It is not uncommon, for instance, for individuals to say that plain words can’t convey what they mean or that they simply cannot put certain experiences into words, something that, ironically, poetry might accomplish in poetic terms.

How, then, are such experiences and their opinions to be communicated in interviews? Must some respondents literally sing the blues, for example, as folks traditionally have done in the rural South of the United States? Should some experiences be “performed,” rather than simply translated into text? Do mere retellings of others’ experiences compromise the ability of those who experience them to convey the “scenic presence” of the actual experiences in their lives? A number of researchers take such issues to heart and have been experimenting, for several years now, with alternative representational forms that they believe can convey respondents’ experience more on, if not in, their own terms (see Clifford and Marcus 1986; Ellis and Flaherty 1992; Ellis and Bochner 1996; Reed-Danahay 1997; see also this volume Ellis and Berger, Chapter 23). The border between fact and fiction itself is being explored for its empowering capacity, taking empowerment’s informing discourse firmly into the realm of literature.

**Voice and Ownership**

When we empower the respondent (or the informing coparticipant) in the interview encounter, we establish a space for the respondent’s own story to be heard—at least this is the reasoning behind Misher’s and others’ aims in this regard. But questions do arise in relation to the voices we listen to when we provide respondents the opportunity to convey their own stories. Whose voices do we hear? From where do respondents obtain the material they communicate to us in interviews? Is there always only one story for a given respondent to tell, or can there be several to choose from? If the latter, the question can become, Which among these is most tellable under the circumstances? And, as if these questions weren’t challenging enough, do the queries themselves presume that they are answerable in straightforward terms, or do answers to them turn in different directions
and get worked out in the very course of the interview in narrative practice?

**SUBJECT POSITIONS AND RELATED VOICES**

An anecdote from Jaber Gubrium’s doctoral supervision duties speaks to the heart of these issues. Gubrium was serving on the dissertation committee of a graduate student who was researching substance abuse among pharmacists. The student was especially keen to allow the pharmacists being interviewed to convey in their own words their experiences of illicitly using drugs, seeking help for their habits, and going through rehabilitation. He hoped to understand how those who “should know better” would account for what happened to them.

When the interviews were completed, the student analyzed the interview data thematically and presented the themes in the dissertation along with individual accounts of experience. Interestingly, several of the themes identified in the pharmacists’ stories closely paralleled the familiar recovery rubrics of self-help groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) and Narcotics Anonymous (N.A.). Gubrium noted this, and it turned out that many, if not all, of the pharmacists had participated in these recovery groups and evidently had incorporated the groups’ ways of narrating the substance abuse experience into their “own” stories. For example, respondents spoke of the experience of “hitting bottom” and organized the trajectory of the recovery process in relation to that very important low point in their lives. Gubrium raised the issue of the extent to which the interview material could be analyzed as the pharmacists’ “own” stories as opposed to the stories of these recovery programs. At a doctoral committee meeting, he asked, “Whose voice do we hear when these pharmacists tell their stories? Their own or N.A.’s?” He asked, in effect, whether the stories belonged to these individuals or to the organizations that promulgated their discourse.

The issue of voice is important because it points to the subject who is assumed to be responding in interviews (Gubrium 1993; Holstein and Gubrium 2000). Voice references the subject position that is taken for granted behind speech. Voice works at the level of everyday life, whereas subject positions are what we imagine to be their operating standpoints. This is the working side of our earlier discussion of the subjects behind interview participants. The possibility of alternative voicings and varied subject positions turned researchers’ attention to concerns such as how interview participants collaborate to construct the interview’s shifting subjectivities in relation to the topics under consideration.

Empirically, the concept of voice leads us to the question of who—or what subject—speaks over the course of an interview and from what standpoint. For example, does a 50-year-old man offer the opinions of a “professional” at the apex of his successful career, or might his voice be that of a husband and father reflecting on what he has missed as a result in the way of family life? Or will he speak as a church elder, a novice airplane pilot, or the “enabling” brother of an alcoholic as the interview unfolds? All of these are possible, given the range of contemporary experiences that he could call upon to account for his opinions. At the same time, it is important to entertain the possibility that the respondent’s subjectivity and variable voices emerge out of the immediate interview’s interaction and are not necessarily preformed in the respondent’s ostensible vessel of answers. Indeed, topics raised in the interview may incite respondents to voice subjectivities never contemplated before.

As noted earlier, at times one can actually hear interview participants indicate subject positions. Verbal prefaces, for example, can provide clues to subject position and voice, but they are often ignored in interview research. Phrases such as “to put myself in someone else’s shoes” and “to put on a different hat” are signals that respondents employ to voice shifts in position.
Acknowledging this, in an interview study of nurses on the qualities of good infant care, we probably would not be surprised to hear a respondent say something like, “That’s when I have my RN cap on, but as a mother, I might tell you a different story.” Sometimes respondents are quite forthright in giving voice to alternative points of view in precisely those terms, as when a respondent prefaces remarks with, say, “Well, from the point of view of a . . . .” Such phrases are not interview debris; they convey the important and persistent subjective work of the interview encounter.

In the actual practice of asking interview questions and giving answers, things are seldom so straightforward, however. An interview, for example, might start under the assumption that a father or a mother is being interviewed, which the interview’s introductions might appear to confirm. But there is no guarantee that particular subjectivities will prevail throughout. There’s the matter of the ongoing construction of subjectivity, which unfolds with the give-and-take of the interview encounter. Something said later in the interview, for example, might prompt the respondent to figure, not necessarily audibly, that he really had, “all along,” been responding from a quite different point of view than was evident at the start. Unfortunately, shifts in subjectivity are not always evident in so many words or comments. Indeed, the possibility of an unforeseen change in subjectivity might not be evident until the very end of an interview, if at all, when a respondent remarks for the first time, “Yeah, that’s the way all of us who were raised down South do with our children,” making it unclear which subject had been providing responses to the interviewer’s questions—the voice of this individual parent or her regional membership and its associated experiential sensibilities.

Adding to these complications, subject position and voice must also be considered in relation to the perceived voice of the interviewer. Who, after all, is the interviewer in the eyes of the respondent? How will the interviewer role be positioned into the conversational matrix? For example, respondents in debriefings might comment that an interviewer sounded more like a company man than a human being, or that a particular interviewer made the respondent feel that the interview was “just an ordinary person, like myself.” Indeed, even issues of social justice might creep in and position the interviewer, say, as a worthless hack, as the respondent takes the interviewer to be “just one more token of the establishment,” choosing to silence her own voice in the process (see Dunbar, Rodriguez, and Parker, Chapter 7, this volume). This raises the possibility that the respondent’s working subjectivity is constructed out of the unfolding interpersonal reflections of the interview participants’ attendant historical experiences. It opens to consideration, for example, an important question: If the interviewee had not been figured to be just an “ordinary” respondent, who (which subject) might the respondent have been in giving voice to his or her opinions?

As if this doesn’t muddy the interview waters enough, imagine what the acknowledgment of multiple subjectivities does to the concept of sample size, another dimension figured to be under considerable control in traditional interview research. To decompose the designated respondent into his or her (multiple) working subjects is to raise the possibility that any single element of a sample can expand or contract in size in the course of the interview, increasing or decreasing the sample n accordingly.Treating subject positions and their associated voices seriously, we might find that an ostensibly single interview could actually be, in practice, an interview with several subjects, whose particular identities may be only partially clear. Under the circumstances, to be satisfied that one has completed an interview with a single respondent and to code it as such because it was formally conducted with a single embodied individual is to be rather cavalier about the
complications of subjectivity and of the narrative organization of sample size.

As Mishler (1986) has pointed out, such matters have traditionally been treated as technical issues in interview research. Still, they have long been informally recognized, and an astute positivistic version of the complexities entailed has been theorized and researched with great care and insight (see, for example, Fishbein 1967). Jean Converse and Howard Schuman's (1974) delightful book on survey research as interviewers see it, for instance, illuminates this recognition with intriguing case material.

There is ample reason, then, for some researchers to approach the interview as a set of activities that are ongoingly accomplished, not just completed. In standardized interviewing, one would need to settle conclusively on matters of who the subject behind the respondent is, lest it be impossible to know to which population generalizations can be made. Indeed, a respondent who shifts the subject to whom she is giving voice would pose dramatic technical difficulties for survey researchers, such that, for example, varied parts of a single completed interview would have to be coded as the responses of different subjects and be generalizable to different populations. This takes us well beyond the possibility of coding in the traditional sense of the term, a point that, of course, Harold Garfinkel (1967) and Aaron Cicourel (1964), among others, made years ago and that, oddly enough, inspired the approach Mishler advocates.

OWNERSHIP AND EMPOWERMENT

Having raised these vexing issues, can we ever effectively address the question of who owns the opinions and stories expressed in interviews, including both the standardized interview and the more open-ended, narrative form? Whose "own" story do we obtain in the process of interviewing? Can we ever discern ownership in individual terms? And how does this relate to respondent empowerment?

Recall that ownership implies that the respondent has, or has title to, a story and that the interview can be designed to bring this forth. But the concept of voice suggests that this is not as straightforward as it might seem. The very activity of opening the interview to extended discussion among the participants indicates that ownership can be a joint or collaborative matter, if not rather fleeting in designation. In practice, the idea of "own story" is not just a commendable research goal but something participants themselves seek to resolve as they move through the interview conversation. Each participant tentatively engages the interactive problems of ownership as a way of sorting out the assumed subjectivities in question and proceeds on that basis, for the practical communicative purposes of completing the interview.

When a respondent such as a substance-abusing pharmacist responds to a question about the future, "I've learned [from N.A.] that it's best to take it one day at a time; I really believe that," it is clear that the pharmacist's narrative is more than an individual's story. What he owns would seem to have wended its way through the informing voices of other subjectivities: Narcotics Anonymous's recovery ideology, this particular respondent's articulation of that ideology, the communicative twists on both discourses that emerge in the give-and-take of the interview exchange, the project's own framing of the issues and resulting agenda of questions, the interviewer's ongoing articulation of that agenda, and the reflexively collaborative flow of unforeseen voiced and unvoiced subjectivities operating in the unfolding exchange. What's more, all of these together can raise meta-communicative concerns about "what this [the interview] is all about, anyway," which the respondent might ask at any time. Under the circumstances, it would seem that ownership is something rather diffusely spread about the topical and prosesual
landscape of speech activities entailed in the interview.

Respondent empowerment would appear to be a working, rather than definitive, feature of these speech activities. It is not clear in practice how one could distinguish any one respondent's own story from the tellable stories available to this and other respondents, which they might more or less share. Putting it in terms of "tellable stories" further complicates voice, subjectivity, and empowerment. And, at the other end of the spectrum of what is tellable, there are those perplexing responses that, in the respondent's search for help in formulating an answer, can return "power" to the very source that would hold it in the first place. It is not uncommon to hear respondents remark that they are not sure how they feel or what they think, or that they haven't really thought about the question or topic before, or to hear them actually think out loud about what it might mean personally to convey particular sentiments or answer in a specific way—and ask the interviewer for assistance in doing so.

Philosophically, the central issue here is a version of Ludwig Wittgenstein's (1953) "private language" problem. Wittgenstein argues that because language—and, by implication, stories and other interview responses—is a shared "form of life," the idea that one could have available exclusively to oneself an unshared, private language would not make much sense. Given the reflexive duality of self-consciousness, one could not even share an ostensible private language with oneself. In more practical terms, this means that whatever is conveyed by the respondent to the interviewer is always subject to the question of what it means, in which case we're back to square one with shared knowledge and the various "language games" that can be collaboratively engaged by interview participants to assign meaning to these questions and responses. Empowerment in this context is not so much a matter of providing the communicative means for the respondent to tell his or her "own" story as it is a matter of recognizing, first, that responses or stories, as the case might be, are collaborative accomplishments and, second, that there are as many individual responses or stories to tell as there are recognizable forms of response. This, of course, ultimately brings us full circle to the analytically hoary problem of whose interests are being served when the individually "empowered" respondent speaks, implicating power in relation to the broader social horizons of speech and discourse.

**In Investigating New Concerns**

In the following chapters, *Inside Interviewing* investigates an array of concerns that arise when we begin to look at the interview through new lenses. Ranging from the conceptual to the technical, these issues have emerged from researchers' burgeoning self-consciousness and willingness to see past conventional understandings and commonsense notions to uncover the complexities inside interviewing.

**SUBJECTS AND RESPONDENTS**

Part I explores the implications of a more nuanced appreciation for subjectivity—for the variety of subjects and subject positions that stand behind interview participants. The assumption of a single, stable subject behind the interview participant is now less an operating assumption for interviewing than it is a significant procedural and analytic issue. The subjective embodiments of the respondent and the interviewer are no longer merely taken for granted. While the selected respondent might be female, for the purposes of the research encounter, can we be sure that the voice that comes through in the interview represents the beliefs and sentiments of a woman, as opposed to, say, a business executive, a marathon runner, or an alcoholic?
The female respondent, like most respondents, holds many roles; she might also be African American and working class. How do these standpoints figure in what she says in the interview? Indeed, this combination of identities is located at the intersection of myriad subject positions, each with specific social, historical, and cultural resonances. Simply moving along in the interview, in technically correct form, as if subject position didn’t matter—eliciting answers from, encouraging, acknowledging, and probing the respondent with an image of a constant subject behind the respondent—tends to homogenize the reports and experiences of even the most diverse set of respondents. To then analyze the data as if they also were the responses of constant subjects only exaggerates the problem.

The authors of the chapters in Part I argue against the homogenization of the interview with respect to distinctive respondents. Taken together, they convey the message that interviewers can no longer rely upon singular categories and identities as the basis for seeking and analyzing respondent standpoints. Each of the chapters also suggests that, when it comes to “distinctive” respondents, researchers would do well to combine interviewing with more ethnographic approaches. The aim is to better understand the “distinctive”—as opposed to the ostensibly more “familiar”—respondent’s experience in its often hidden or overlooked social contexts.

TECHNICAL CONCERNS

New lenses on the interview also sharpen researchers’ technical focus on what’s happening inside the interview. This is center stage in Part II. One challenge that frequently comes to the fore as researchers approach diverse subjects/respondents is overcoming a reluctance to participate. Our complex and pluralistic society is composed of myriad subgroups and subcultures, each having its own loyalties and interests. As these diverse respondents are increasingly subjected to the demands of interviews, cooperation may be elusive. Gaining access to the lives of others now demands a technology of its own (see Adler and Adler, Chapter 8, this volume).

At one time, face-to-face interviewing was the only practical means of “learning from strangers.” The rapid deployment of telephones to individual households following World War II gradually turned the matter of asking and answering, especially research interview questions, to the issue of whether the face-to-face interview was necessary to obtain useful responses. Researchers also began to ask if a more economical telephone technology would do the trick. Researchers have investigated the relative adequacy of face-to-face and telephone interviewing and continue to explore the nuances of their differences (see Shuy, Chapter 9, this volume).

Telephone interviewing may have been the first major technological leap forward for survey interviewing. It was accompanied, at the data management and analytic stages, by the rapid expansion of electronic information processing. Today, the industry standard is the telephone survey tied to computerized data-monitoring and data management technology (see Couper and Hansen, Chapter 10, and Schaeffer and Maynard, Chapter 11, this volume).

Researchers’ heightened appreciation for just what their data might be has provoked closer examination of just how those data are treated. No longer do interviewers merely jot down a few notes about what was said as a way of capturing the essence of an open-ended interview. Instead, most interviewers conscientiously develop strategies for recording and transcribing interview data to suit their analytic questions and needs (see Poland, Chapter 13, this volume). And of course data analysis has now moved into the computer age, with its attendant advantages, challenges, and complexities (see Seale, Chapter 14, this volume).
ANALYTIC OPTIONS

New lenses even change the nature of what interview data can be taken to mean. They provide different ways of apprehending and understanding experience as it is conveyed through the interview process. This, in turn, implicates a set of procedures or ways of organizing, categorizing, and interpreting data. There is no single correct approach to data analysis. Even though it might appear that a naturalistic field worker, say, takes careful notes and interprets those notes in relation to a conceptual framework in much the same way as a constructionist field worker might do, the alternative perspectives present different analytic strategies. The naturalistic field worker is likely to orient to the data as the facts of experience, whereas the constructionist field worker emphasizes and aims to describe how those facts come into being in the first place (see Gubrium and Holstein 1997). The methods themselves—observing, recording field notes, coding, categorizing, extrapolating, interpreting—believe what those methods are considered to be doing in relation to empirical material. In the case of the naturalist, for instance, method is seen as a matter of “gathering” data; constructionist methods orient more to the goal of revealing how social actions and interactions become data. This is a distinction that Kathy Charmaz makes in Chapter 15 in relation to forms of grounded theory analysis.

Of course, these perspectives are not completely distinct from one another, either; there can be considerable overlap in analytic sensibilities. Studies of narrative, for example, center on stories in some form or other; they might be informed by interpersonal approaches at one end of a continuum (see Riessman, Chapter 16, this volume) and cultural or historical perspectives at the other (see Cândida Smith, Chapter 17, this volume). Yet they all typically attempt to identify narrative themes or narrative structures. How they interpret themes and structures distinguishes them from one another.

While the chapters in Part III don’t cover the strategic waterfront of data analysis, they do represent well-established options. One very popular strategy stems from Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss’s development in the 1960s of what has come to be called “grounded theory methodology” (see Charmaz, Chapter 15, this volume). Reacting to the post-World War II emphasis in social research on formal theory construction and hypothesis formation separate from the data, Glaser and Strauss developed an analytic strategy that viewed theoretical formulation as best conducted from the ground up, meaning in close and continuous relation to empirical material. Charmaz’s chapter presents this approach, which has grown immensely popular. Charmaz adds a constructionist twist to Glaser and Strauss, drawing inspiration from the many perspectives in social research that now view social life as continuously created and not simply as empirically available.

Chapters by Catherine Riessman and Richard Cândida Smith present alternative analytic strategies for narrative materials. These perspectives approach empirical material in terms of their story-like qualities. Taking it for granted that experience comes to us in the form of stories, the authors show what can be done with interview data from different points of view. Riessman focuses on personal stories, narratives that give shape to individual experience. Typically, she searches for the narrative strategies that storytellers use to formulate their experiences, such as compartmentalizing them by narrating them differently. Borrowing from literary analysis, Riessman points out the narrative importance of a variety of story elements, such as scene-setting, characterization, employment, and thematization.

Not all narrative approaches address personal stories. Cândida Smith brings other disciplinary and theoretical sensibilities to bear on alternative kinds of narrative
material. As he explains, there are a number of perspectives available, ranging from naturalistic efforts to represent historical events through personal stories, to constructionist views that take concerted account of the ways respondents make meaning by appropriating historical material for their own uses. Elaborating the latter view, Cándida Smith's analysis is not concerned with the "mistakes" made in the narrative process, but rather with documenting the ways interviewees communicatively build their worlds out of the historical material available to them.

Marjorie DeVault and Liza McCoy's chapter offers an analytic strategy for interview material originally formulated by Dorothy Smith, a Canadian feminist working at the intersection of institutions and everyday life. While the strategy has come to be called "institutional ethnography," the approach is not immediately recognizable as either institutional or ethnographic. As the subtitle of the authors' chapter indicates, the approach orients to the use of "interviews to investigate ruling relations." According to DeVault, McCoy, and their colleagues, institutional discourses and their lived normative preferences can be made visible by approaching interviewee's responses as they are mediated by the relations of ruling in which their experiences are embedded. Distinct traces of institutional relations of ruling can be uncovered in institutionally mediated interview material. The result is that interviews can be used to study institutional processes, revealing in individual testaments what the traditional ethnographer might otherwise document from observational material.

The last chapter in Part III, by Carolyn Baker, is less focused on the substance of interview material than it is on strategies for analyzing how respondents' use of categories gives meaning to what they say about their lives and experiences. Presenting various forms of what ethnomethodologists call "categorization analysis," Baker shows how member categorization (not the researcher's categories or codes for interview material) serves to make meaning. Here again, we are presented with respondents who actively construct their experiences, not merely report them in varied detail.

**REPRESENTATIONAL ISSUES**

In Part IV, the concluding section of *Inside Interviewing*, the authors try on new lenses to look both backward and forward at the question of how to construe and represent interview material. Postmodern sensibilities now keep us from weighing alternatives simply in terms of truth and clarity. What might be considered a truly representative depiction of interview material now must wend its way through the varied social and cultural contingencies of truth.

The representational challenges from this standpoint are manifold and complex. When respondents speak of their experiences, do we hear their "own" voices or the expressions of the social and cultural discourses that have influenced them? How might this be conveyed in writing? Do the sentiments of the popular culture industry mediate the "heartfelt" expressions of interviewees? How is this taken into account in conveying interview material? How does the sense of narrative ownership—which varies by institutional setting, generation, and culture, among other mediating conditions of speech—affect narrative expression? And how does power, as it percolates across the social statuses of interviewer and respondent, relate to what is and isn't said in interviews? In what ways does this affect representation?

Paul Atkinson and Amanda Coffey begin the discussion in Chapter 20 by revisiting a classic article published by Howard Becker and Blanche Geer in the 1950s, about the relative value of participant observation versus interviewing. Becker and Geer focus their comparison on the question of which method for obtaining data represents social life most accurately. Ultimately, they come down on the side of participant observation. For Becker and Geer, participant
observation or “being there” is an ostensibly more direct or pure way of discerning the contours of social life. What the researcher sees and hears is not mediated by the invariably biased retrospections of interview respondents.

Both Becker and Geer’s presentation, and the debate following the publication of the article, took for granted the essential distinction between empirical material and its representation. It is this assumption, not the methods’ comparative accuracy, that becomes Atkinson and Coffey’s point of departure. According to Atkinson and Coffey, in the context of postmodern epistemological sensibilities, the debate needs to be viewed in a much different light, embedded as it now must be in foundational issues of truthfulness and centering on a dialectic of reflection and representation.

Focusing more explicitly on cultural representations, the next two chapters address complex issues relating to moving outside our familiar cultural milieu. In Chapter 21, Anne Ryen examines the conceptual and methodological difficulties of transporting experiential data across cultures. Chapter 22, by Kirin Narayan and Kenneth George, takes up several of the social and cultural contingencies of truth that become topical as we begin to look inside the interview. Based mainly on interviews conducted in South Asia, Narayan and George discuss the representational difficulties of simply assigning interview material to individual respondents. Interview responses, the authors argue, are always about both individual biography and culture; researchers would be best served by articulating the interplay of biography and culture, documenting this in both individual and cultural terms. As Narayan and George point out, the idea of the “individual” interview cannot be taken for granted; individuality, as it bears on narrative relevance, is a representational issue.

Representing empirical material clearly is no longer just a matter of good, accessible writing. There’s a new leading question: Is it enough to be clear about the data, or do the many ways interview data are mediated by their social and cultural contingencies need to be given their due in representing the data in writing? The related question of whether standard scientific writing is adequate to the challenges of postmodern interview sensibilities is now itself at the forefront.

Carolyn Ellis and Leigh Berger (Chapter 23) address this issue by extending the representation of interview material to researchers’ deliberations about what the material means. Ellis and Berger offer us a view of the way ongoing reflections on the interviews in relation to interviewers’ own experiences play into question formation and the interview process itself. The authors choose to represent their material in a layered account, dividing their writing between their own deliberations as coresearchers and interviewers on the one hand, and their interviewees’ responses on the other. As we read the chapter, we find that this also may be too distinct a representational division, as each layer of text serves to inform the reader of the developing personal and conceptual relevance of the interview material “itself.”

Finally, Charles Briggs in Chapter 24 turns us directly to the issue of power. Briggs describes the differential social and cultural statuses of interview participants as these relate to both narrative expression and narrative representation. Differences in social status between the interviewee and interviewer, for example, play into the question of whether, and how, the proverbial passive “vessel of answers” that interviewees are often assumed to be, will activate their subjectivity in the interview context. Power also bears on how interview material will be represented. This may relate to whether analytic writing, say, will display truths defined in terms of criteria such as procedural adequacy and sample representativeness, or will take into account the representational acumen and preferences of respondents themselves.
Taken together, the four parts of *Inside Interviewing* provide an array of penetrating glances through different lenses. They reveal the myriad fascinating challenges confronting us when we look inside the contemporary research interview. Our concern with the practice of interviewing is no longer just procedural. Rather, it now ranges across both technical developments and conceptual challenges to open to view not only what interview practice is, but also what it might be.

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