



Handbook of Interview Research

1 From the Individual Interview to the Interview Society

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Book Title: Handbook of Interview Research

Chapter Title: "1 From the Individual Interview to the Interview Society"

Pub. Date: 2001

Access Date: May 30, 2017

Publishing Company: SAGE Publications, Inc.

City:

Print ISBN: 9780761919513

Online ISBN: 9781412973588

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412973588.n3>

Print pages: 2-32

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1 From the Individual Interview to the Interview Society

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At first glance, the interview seems simple and self-evident. The interviewer coordinates a conversation aimed at obtaining desired information. He or she makes the initial contact, schedules the event, designates its location, sets out the ground rules, and then begins to question the interviewee or “respondent.” Questions elicit answers in more or less anticipatable format until the interviewer's agenda is completed and the interview ends.

The respondent provides the answers. She or he is usually well aware of the routine and waits until questions are posed before answering. The respondent's obligation is not to manage the encounter or to raise queries, but to offer information from his or her personal cache of experiential knowledge. Respondents are relatively passive in their roles, which are delimited by the interviewer's coordinating activity and the available repository of answers. Should a respondent ask questions in his or her own right, the interviewer typically treats these questions as requests for clarification. The interviewer's responses are merely a means of keeping the interview and the respondent on track.

This is the familiar asymmetrical relationship that we recognize as interviewing. Except for technical nuances, we are conversant with either role in the encounter. Most educated urbanites, for instance, would know what it means to interview someone and would be able to manage the activity adequately in its broad details, from start to finish, if asked to do so. Likewise, most of us readily respond to demographic questionnaires, product-use surveys, public opinion polls, and health inventories in considerable detail; we are willing and able to provide all sorts of information to strangers about the most intimate aspects of our lives. We carry out such encounters time and again with little hesitation and hardly an afterthought. The individual interview has become a commonplace feature of everyday life.

The Democratization of Opinion

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 interviewlike 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).

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.

The Modern Temper

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.

An Individualizing Discourse

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 Damians 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, Damians 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 Damians'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 Damians 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 Damiens'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” opinion.

Learning from Strangers

The title of Robert Weiss's (1994) book on interviewing, *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 (see Warren, Chapter 4, this volume), 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 experiences is potentially accessible, according to Weiss; the interview is a virtual window on that experience, a kind of universal panopticon. In answering the question of why we interview, Weiss offers a compelling portrayal of the democratization of opinion:

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 Damians's "unheard" cries. The interview itself has created, as well as tapped into, the vast world of individual experience that now constitutes the substance of everyday life.

The Interview Society

If the interview has helped to constitute the modern individual, has it simultaneously transformed society? It certainly has transported the myriad details of the most personal experience into the public domain. Indeed, it has established these realms as important sites for securing answers to what it means to be part of everyday life. Our social world now

comprises viable and consequential individual opinions, assembled and offered up by actively agentic subjects, whose responses convey the individual particulars of modern society. With the spread of the discourse of individualized subjectivity, we now are prepared as both questioners and answerers to produce readily the society of which we are a part. The modern temper gives us the interview as a significant means for realizing that subjectivity and the social contexts that bring it about.

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, Geraldo Rivera, Ricki Lake, 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.

Interviews extend to professional practice as well. As the contributions to Part III of this *Handbook* indicate, myriad institutions employ interviewing to generate useful and often crucial information. Physicians conduct medical interviews with their patients in order to formulate diagnoses and monitor treatment and progress (see Zoppi and Epstein, Chapter 18). Employers interview job applicants (see Latham and Millman, Chapter 23). Psychotherapy has always been a largely interview-based enterprise. Its varied psychological and psychiatric perspectives have perhaps diversified the interview more than any other professional practice. As Gale Miller, Steve de Shazer, and Peter De Jong show in their essay on the therapy interview (Chapter 19), this ranges from traditional forms of in-depth interviewing to more contemporary solution-focused encounters that center on "restorying" experience. Even forensic investigation has come a long way from the interview practices of the Inquisition, where giving the "third degree" was a common feature of interrogation (see McKenzie, Chapter 21).

As interviewing has become more pervasive in the mass media and in professional practice, the interviewing industry itself has developed by leaps and bounds. Survey research, public opinion polling, and marketing research lead the way. Survey research has always been conducted for academic purposes, but today it is increasingly employed in service to commercial interests as well (see Platt, Chapter 2, this volume). The interviewing industry now extends from individual product-use inquiries to group interviewing services, where focus group discussions quickly establish consumer product preferences. Movie studios even use focus groups to decide which versions of motion picture finales will be most popularly received. Indeed, the group interview is among the most rapidly growing information-gathering techniques on the contemporary scene (see Morgan, Chapter 7, this volume).

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's reasoning underscores the democratization of opinion that interviewing has enhanced. 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. Not only do media and human service professionals utilize interviews, but it has been estimated that fully 90 percent of all social science investigations exploit interview data (Briggs 1986). 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.

The Romantic Impulse

Paul Atkinson and Silverman (1997) point out that the confessional properties of the interview not only construct individual subjectivity but, more and more, deepen and broaden the subjects' experiential truths. We no longer readily turn to the cosmos, the gods, the written word, the high priest, or local authorities for authentic knowledge; rather, we commonly search for authenticity through the in-depth interview. The interview society not only reflexively constructs a compatible subject, but fully rounds this out ontologically by taking us to the proverbial heart of the subject in question.

This reveals the romantic impulse behind the interview and the interview society. If we desire to “really know” the individual subject, then somehow we must provide a means to hear his or her genuine voice. Superficial discussion does not seem to be adequate. Many interviewers explore the emotional enclaves of the self by way of “open-ended” or “in-depth” interviewing. Although, technically, “open-endedness” is merely a way to structure the interview process, Atkinson and Silverman suggest that the term also flags a particular social understanding, namely, that the true, internal voice of the subject comes through only when it is not externally screened or otherwise communicatively constrained.

But, as Atkinson and Silverman advise, authenticity in practice is not an ultimate experiential

truth. It is itself a methodically constructed social product that emerges from its reflexive communicative practices. In other words, authenticity, too, has its constructive technology. Recognizable signs of emotional expression and scenic practices such as direct eye contact and intimate gestures are widely understood to reveal deep truths about individual selves (see also Gubrium and Holstein 1997; Holstein and Gubrium 2000). In in-depth interviews, we “do” deep, authentic experiences as much as we “do” opinion offering in the course of the survey interview. It is not simply a matter of procedure or the richness of data that turns researchers, the interview society, and its truth-seeing audiences to in-depth and open-ended interviewing. It is also a matter of collaboratively making audible and visible the phenomenal depths of the individual subject at the center of our shared concerns.

The Leading Theme

It would therefore be a mistake to treat the interview or any information-gathering technique 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, as the romantic impulses of interviewing imply, it is at the very heart of what we have become and could possibly be as individuals.

That is the leading theme of this *Handbook*: “No method of research can stand outside the cultural and material world” (Silverman 1997:249). Whereas some would view the interview primarily as a research technique, we would do well also to consider its broader social, institutional, and representational contours. At the same time, we must be cautious lest the latter overshadow the interview’s information-gathering contributions, which have been brilliantly and extensively developed by interview researchers for decades. To recognize, elaborate, and deconstruct the broad contours of the interview is not at all to suggest that we pay less attention to its technology in the conventional sense of the term. Rather, it implies just the opposite; we must think carefully about technical matters because they produce the detailed subject as much as they gather information about him or her. Taken together, the chapters of this *Handbook* provide a balance of related concerns, extending from aspects of the conventional technology of the interview including forms of interviewing and diverse data gathering and analytic strategies to the various ways interviewing relates to distinctive respondents, its institutional auspices, and representational issues.

The Subjects behind Interview Participants

We began this introductory chapter by noting that the interview seems simple and self-evident. In actual practice, this is hardly the case. If the technology of the interview not only produces interview data but also simultaneously constructs individual and public opinion, what are the working contours of the encounter? What does it mean, in terms of communicative practice, to be an interviewer? What is the presumed subjectivity of this participant? Correspondingly, what does it mean to be a respondent? What is the presumed subjectivity of that participant? These, of course, are procedural questions, to a degree, and several authors who contribute to this *Handbook* address them in just these terms. As the chapters that follow show, there is nothing technically simple about the contemporary practice of asking and answering interview questions. But the questions also broker discursive and institutional issues related to matters of contemporary subjectivity. This complicates things, and it is to these issues that we turn in the rest of this chapter as a way of providing a more nuanced context for understanding the individual interview and the interview society.

Let's begin to unpack the 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. (P. 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 un-contaminated 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 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 controlling 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.

Activating Interview Subjects

As researchers have become more aware of the interview as a site for the production of meaning, they have increasingly come to appreciate the activity of the subjects projected behind both the respondent and the interviewer. The interview is being reconceptualized as an occasion for purposefully animated participants to *construct* versions of reality interactionally rather than merely purvey data (see Holstein and Gubrium 1995). This trend reflects an increasingly pervasive appreciation for the constitutive character of social interaction and of the constructive role played by active subjects in authoring their experiences.

Sentiments along these lines have been building for some time across diverse disciplines. Nearly a half century ago, for example, Ithiel de Sola Pool (1957), a prominent critic of public opinion polling, argued presciently that the dynamic, communicative contingencies of the interview literally activated respondents' opinions. Every interview, Pool suggested, is an "interpersonal drama with a developing plot" (p. 193). The metaphor conveys a far more active sense of interview participation than the "prospector for meaning" suggests. As Pool indicated:

The social milieu in which communication takes place [during interviews] modifies not only what a person dares to say but even what he thinks he chooses to say. And these variations in expression cannot be viewed as mere deviations from some underlying "true" opinion, for there is no neutral, non-social, uninfluenced situation to provide that baseline. (P. 192)

Conceiving of the interview in this fashion casts interview participants as virtual *practitioners* of everyday life who work constantly to discern and designate the recognizable and orderly features of the experience under consideration. It transforms the subject behind the respondent from a repository of information and opinions or a wellspring of emotions into a productive source of knowledge. From the time a researcher identifies a research topic, through respondent selection, questioning and answering, and, finally, the interpretation of responses, interviewing is a concerted interactional project. Indeed, the subject behind the respondent now, more or less, becomes an imagined product of the project. Working within the interview itself, subjects are fleshed out, rationally and emotionally, in relation to the give-and-take of the interview process, the interview's research purposes, and its surrounding social contexts.

Construed as active, the subject behind the respondent not only holds the details of a life's experience but, in the very process of offering them up to the interviewer, constructively shapes the information. The active respondent can hardly "spoil" what he or she is, in effect, subjectively constructing in the interview process. Rather, the activated subject pieces experiences together before, during, and after occupying the respondent role. This subject is always making meaning, regardless of whether he or she is actually being interviewed.

An active subject behind the interviewer is also implicated in the production of knowledge. His or her participation in the process is not viewed in terms of standardization or constraint; neutrality is not figured to be necessary or achievable. One cannot very well taint knowledge if that knowledge is not conceived as existing in some pure form apart from the circumstances of its production. The active subject behind the interviewer thus becomes a necessary, practical counterpart to the active subject behind the respondent. Interviewer and, ultimately, researcher contributions to the information produced in interviews are not viewed as incidental or immaterial. Nor is interviewer participation considered in terms of contamination. Rather, the subject behind the interviewer is seen as actively and unavoidably engaged in the

interactional co-construction of the interview's content.

Interactional contingencies influence the construction of the active subjectivities of the interview. Especially important here are the varied subject positions articulated in the interview process, which need to be taken into account in the interpretation of interview material. For example, an interview project might center on the quality of care and quality of life of nursing home residents (see Gubrium 1993). This might be part of a study relating to the national debate about the organization and value of home versus institutional care. Careful attention to the way participants link substantive matters with biographical ones can vividly reveal a highly active subject. For instance, a nursing home resident might speak animatedly during an interview about the quality of care in her facility, asserting that, "for a woman, it ultimately gets down to feelings," invoking an emotional subject. Another resident might coolly and methodically list specifics about her facility's quality of care, never once mentioning her gender or her feelings about the care she receives. Offering her own take on the matter, this respondent might state that "getting emotional" over "these things" clouds clear judgment, implicating a rationalized subject. When researchers take this active subject into account, what is otherwise a contradictory and inconclusive data set is transformed into the meaningful, intentionally crafted responses of quite active respondents.

The standpoint from which information is offered continually unfolds in relation to ongoing interview interaction. In speaking of the quality of care, for example, nursing home residents, as interview respondents, not only offer substantive thoughts and feelings pertinent to the topic under consideration but simultaneously and continuously monitor who they are in relation to themselves and to the person questioning them. For example, prefacing her remarks about the quality of life in her facility with the statement "Speaking as a woman," a nursing home resident actively informs the interviewer that she is to be heard as a woman, not as someone else not a mere resident, cancer patient, or abandoned mother. If and when she subsequently comments, "If I were a man in this place," the resident frames her thoughts and feelings about the quality of life differently, producing an alternative subject: the point of view of a man as spoken by a female respondent. The respondent is clearly working up experiential identities as the interview progresses.

Because the respondent's subjectivity and related experience are continually being assembled and modified, the "truth" value of interview responses cannot be judged simply in terms of whether those responses match what lies in an ostensibly objective vessel of answers. Rather, the value of interview data lies both in their meanings and in how meanings are constructed. These *what* and *how* matters go hand in hand, as two components of practical meaning-making action (see Gubrium and Holstein 1997). The entire process is fueled by the reality-constituting contributions of all participants; interviewers, too, are similarly implicated in the co-construction of the subject positions from which they ask the questions at hand (see in this volume Schaeffer and Maynard, Chapter 28; Briggs, Chapter 44).

The multiple subjects that could possibly stand behind interview participants add several layers of complication to the interview process as well as to the analysis of interview data. Decidedly different procedural strictures are required to accommodate and account for alternating subjects. Indeed, the very question of what constitutes or serves as data critically relates to these issues of subjectivity. What researchers choose to highlight when they analyze interview responses flows directly from how the issues are addressed (see Gubrium and Holstein 1997; see also Baker, Chapter 37, this volume).

Empowering Respondents

Reconceptualizing what it means to interview and to analyze interview material has led to far-reaching innovations in research (see the contributions to this volume by Fontana, Chapter 8; Riessman, Chapter 33; Cándida Smith, Chapter 34; Denzin, Chapter 40; Ellis and Berger, Chapter 41; Richardson, Chapter 42; Rosenblatt, Chapter 43). It has 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 44, 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 antilinguistic, 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 28, 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 even token responses, given that a fundamental rule of conversational exchange is that turns must be taken in the unfolding interview process. To eliminate even 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 in, developed through, and shaped by the discourse between interviewers and respondents.... An adequate understanding of interviews depends on recognizing how interviewers reformulate 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 storying them. When, in turn, we encourage elaboration, we commonly use such narrative devices as “Go on” and “Then what happened?” to prompt further storylike 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 (see the contributions to this volume by Platt, Chapter 2; Warren, Chapter 4; Fontana, Chapter 8; Riessman, Chapter 33; Ellis and Berger, Chapter 41). 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; Zoppi and Epstein, Chapter 18, this volume) 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 (see Johnson, Chapter 5, this volume). 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 (see Chapter 42, this volume), 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 44, 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 in this volume Fontana, Chapter 8; Ellis and Berger, Chapter 41). 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 (see Rosenblatt, Chapter 43, this volume).

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 Mishler'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 subjectspeak 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 question—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 interviewer 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 14, 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 processual 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.

Kirin Narayan and Kenneth George (Chapter 39, this volume) inform us further that empowerment is also a cultural prerogative, something that the interviewer does not expressly control and, given the opportunity, cannot simply choose to put into effect. Cultures of storytelling enter into the decision as to whether there is even a story to convey or relevant experiences to highlight. Although the democratization of opinion potentially turns interviewers toward any and all individuals for their accounts, not all individuals believe that their opinions are worthy of communication. The Asian Indian women Narayan interviewed, for example, did not think they had opinions worth telling unless they had done "something different" with their lives. It had to be something "special"; as one woman put it, "You ate, drank, slept, served your husband and brought up your children. What's the story in that?" This powerfully affected the stories that were heard in the area, tying ownership to the local relevance of one's narrative resources.

Going Concerns and Discursive Environments

Where do tellable stories and other forms of response come from if they are not owned by individuals? How do they figure in what is said in interview situations? It was evident in the previous discussion of the pharmacist drug abuse research that respondents were making use of a very common notion of recovery in today's world, one that seems to have percolated through the entire troubles treatment industry (Gubrium and Holstein 2001). Do this industry and other institutions dealing with human experiences offer us a clue to the question of narrative ownership? Do Narayan's respondents proffer agendas of social, not just individual, relevance?

Erving Goffman's (1961) exploration of what he calls "moral careers" provides a point of departure for addressing such questions. Goffman was especially concerned with the moral careers of stigmatized persons such as mental patients, but the social concerns of his approach are broadly suggestive. In his reckoning, each of us has many selves and associated ways of accounting for our thoughts and actions. According to Goffman, individuals obtain senses of who they are as they move through the various moral environments that offer specifications for identity. A mental hospital, for example, provides patients with particular selves, including ways of presenting who one is, one's past, and one's future. The moral environment of the mental hospital also provides others, such as staff members, acquaintances, and even strangers, with parallel sensibilities toward the patient. In other words, moral environments deploy localized universes of choice for constructing subjectivity, relatedly providing a shared format for voicing participants' selves, thoughts, and feelings. Goffman's view is not so much that these environments govern who and what people are as individuals, but that individuals everyday actors strategically play out who and what they are as the moral agents of particular circumstances.

Goffman is mainly concerned with the face-to-face situations that constitute daily life; he is less concerned with institutional matters. Still, his analysis of moral careers in relation to what he calls "total institutions" points us in an important direction, toward what Everett Hughes ([1942] 1984) calls the "going concerns" of today's world. This is Hughes's way of emphasizing that institutions are not only concerns in having formal and informal mandates; they are social forms that *ongoingly* provide distinct patterning for our thoughts, words, sentiments, and actions.

From the myriad formal organizations in which we work, study, pray, play, and recover to the countless informal associations and networks to which we belong, to our affiliations with racial, ethnic, and gendered groupings, we engage a panoply of going concerns on a daily basis. Taken together, they set the "conditions of possibility" (Foucault 1988) for identity for who and what we could possibly be. Many of these going concerns explicitly structure or reconfigure personal identity. All variety of human service agencies, for example, readily delve into the deepest enclaves of the self in order to ameliorate personal ills. Self-help organizations seem to crop up on every street corner, and self-help literature beckons us from the book spindles of supermarkets and the shelves of every bookstore. "Psychobabble" on radio and TV talk shows constantly prompts us to formulate (or reformulate) who and what we are, urging us to give voice to the selves we live by. The self is increasingly *deprivatized* (even if it never was private in Wittgenstein's terms in the first place), constructed and interpreted under the auspices of these decidedly public going concerns (Gubrium and Holstein 1995, 2000; Holstein and Gubrium 2000).

Since early in the 20th century, social life has come into the purview of countless institutions

whose moral function is to assemble, alter, and reformulate our lives and selves (see Gubrium and Holstein 2001). We refer to these as *discursive environments* because they provide choices for how we articulate our lives and selves. Discursive environments are interactional domains characterized by distinctive ways of interpreting and representing everyday life, of speaking about who and what we are. Institutions such as schools, correctional facilities, clinics, family courts, support groups, recreational clubs, fitness centers, and self-improvement programs promote particular ways of speaking of life. They are families of language games, as it were, for formulating our opinions. They furnish discourses of subjectivity that are accountably put into discursive practice as individuals give voice to experience, such as they are now widely asked to do in interviews.

These going concerns pose new challenges to the concept of the individual respondent, to voice, and to the idea of empowerment. They are not especially hostile to the personal; indeed, they are often in the business of reconstructing the personal from the ground up. Rather, today's variegated landscape of discursive environments provides complex options for who we could be, the conditions of possibility we mentioned earlier. This is the world of multiple subjects and of ways to give voice to them that respondents now increasingly bring with them into interviews, whose discursive resources also figure significantly in marking narrative relevance.

In turn, these environments also provide the source of socially relevant questions that interviewers pose to respondents. Those who conduct surveys, for example, are often sponsored by the very agents who formulate these applicable discourses. The collaborative production of the respondent's own story is therefore shaped, for better or worse, in response to markets and concerns spread well beyond the give- and-take of the individual interview conversation.

This brings us back, full circle, to the interview society. The research context is not the only place in which we are asked interview questions. All the going concerns mentioned above and more are in the interviewing business, all constructing and marshaling the subjects they need to do their work. Each provides a social context for narrative practice, for the collaborative production of the identities and experiences that come to be viewed as the moral equivalents of respondents and interview responses. Medical clinics deploy interviews and, in the process, assemble doctors, patients, and their illnesses (see Zoppi and Epstein, Chapter 18, this volume). Personnel officers interview job applicants and collect information that forms the basis for employment decisions (see Latham and Millman, Chapter 23, this volume). Therapists of all stripes conduct counseling interviews, and now increasingly assemble narrative plots of experiences, which are grounds for further rehabilitative interviewing (see Miller et al., Chapter 19, this volume). The same is true for schools, forensic investigation, and journalistic interviewing, among the broad range of institutional contexts that shape our lives through their collaborative speech activities (see in this volume Altheide, Chapter 20; McKenzie, Chapter 21; Tierney and Dilley, Chapter 22).

The interview society expands the institutional auspices of interviewing well beyond the research context. Indeed, it would have been mistakenly restrictive to limit the purview of this *Handbook* to the research interview alone. Social research is only one of the many sites where subjectivities and the voicing of individual experience are undertaken. What's more, these various going concerns cannot be considered to be independent of one another. As our pharmacist anecdote suggests, the discursive environments of therapy and recovery can be brought directly into the research interview, serving to commingle an agglomeration of institutional voices.

Interview formats are themselves going concerns. The group interview, for example, can take us into a veritable swirl of subject formations and opinion construction, as participants share and make use of narrative material from a broader range of discursive environments than any single one of them might muster to account for his or her experience alone (see Morgan, Chapter 7, this volume). Life story and oral history interviews extend the biographical particulars of the subject and subject matter in time, producing respondents who are incited to trace opinion from early to late life and across eras, something that can be amazingly convoluted when compared to the commonly detemporalized information elicited from cross-sectional survey respondents (see in this volume Atkinson, Chapter 6; Cándida Smith, Chapter 34). The in-depth interview extends experience in emotional terms, affectively elaborating the subject (see Johnson, Chapter 5, this volume).

Identity politics, too, forms going concerns. Although we now might consider that both men and women are proper subjects for interviews, the contributions to this volume on men as respondents, by Michael Schwalbe and Michelle Wolkomir (Chapter 10), and on women as respondents, by Shulamit Reinharz and Susan Chase (Chapter 11), present men and women as “distinctly” historical, if not political, subjects. The idea of interviewing men as men, for example, and not simply assuming that they are general respondents, is of recent vintage, and undoubtedly also is a gendered political response to feminist self-consciousness, according to Schwalbe and Wolkomir. The same can be said for the other “distinctive” respondents discussed in Part II of this *Handbook*. The point here is that, whether responses give voice, say, to children as such, or to gays and lesbians, particular ethnic and racial groups, older people, social elites, or the seriously ill, they are products of the rubrics we bring to bear in prompting ourselves or in being prompted by others to give voice to experience, not just the products of individual empowerment.

Artfulness and Narrative Practice

Lest we socially overdetermine subjectivity, it is important to emphasize that the practice of interviewing does not simply incorporate wholesale the identities proffered by institutionalized concerns and cultural relevancies. Interview participants themselves are actively involved in how these subjectivities are put into play. Although varied institutional auspices provide particular resources for asking and answering questions, prescribe the roles played by interview participants, and privilege certain accounts, interview participants do not behave like robots and adopt and reproduce these resources and roles in their speech activities. If participants are accountable to particular circumstances, such as job interviews, medical diagnostic encounters, or journalistic interviews, they nonetheless borrow from the variety of narrative resources available to them. In this regard, they are more “artful” (Garfinkel 1967) than automatic in realizing their respective roles and voices. This extends to all interview participants, as both interviewers and respondents collaboratively assemble who and what they are in narrative practice.

Our pharmacist anecdote is an important case in point. Although the interviews in question were formal research encounters, it was evident that respondents were not only reporting their “own” experiences, but were interpolating their “own” stories, in part, in N.A. recovery terms. They drew from their experiences in recovery groups to convey to the interviewer what it felt like to be “taken over” by drugs. Several respondents used the familiar metaphor of “hitting bottom” to convey a trajectory for the experience. But these respondents were not simply mouthpieces for Narcotics Anonymous; they gave their own individual spins to the terminology, which, in turn, were selectively applied in their responses. For example, “hitting

bottom” meant different things to different respondents, depending on the biographical particulars of their lives. How hitting bottom narratively figured in one respondent's comments was no guarantee of how it might figure in another's.

Interviewers, too, are artful in coordinating the interview process, even in the context of the standardized survey, which employs rather formalized procedures (see in this volume Schaeffer and Maynard, Chapter 28; Baker, Chapter 37). In some forms of interviewing, such as in-depth interviews, interviewers may use all of the personal narrative resources at their disposal to establish open and trusting relationships with respondents (see Johnson, Chapter 5, this volume). This may involve extensive self-disclosure, following on the assumption that reciprocal self-disclosure is likely.

Taking this a step farther, a growing postmodern trend in interviewing deliberately blurs the line between the interviewer and the respondent, moving beyond symmetry to a considerable overlap of roles (see Fontana, Chapter 8, this volume). Although this may have been characteristic of in-depth interviewing for years, postmodern sensibilities aim for an associated representational inventiveness as much as deep disclosure. Artfulness extends to the representation of interviewers' and researchers' own reflective collaborations in moving from respondent to respondent as the project develops, as Carolyn Ellis and Leigh Berger show in their contribution to this volume (Chapter 41). Of course, interviewers and their sponsoring researchers have always collaborated on the design of interviews and offered collaborative feedback to one another on the interview process. But there is a distinct difference here: Ellis and Berger choose not to separate this from their interview materials. In layered writing, they provide us with an intriguing account of how interviewers interviewing each other artfully and fruitfully combine the interview “data” with their own related life experiences to broaden and enrich the results. Their reflections collaboratively impel them forward to complete additional interviews and revisit old ones in new and interesting ways. The separation in conventional research reports of interviewers' experiences from those of respondents, they argue, is highly artificial and produces sanitized portrayals of the “data” in question. According to Ellis and Berger, researchers may capture collaborative richness by forthrightly presenting the full round of narrative practices that generate responses. Artfulness derives from the interpretive work that is undertaken in mingling together what interviewers draw upon to make meaning in the interview process and what respondents themselves bring along.

Further blurring boundaries, Narayan and George (Chapter 39, this volume) provide a delightful jaunt through the artful relationship between what they call personal narratives and folk narratives. The former allegedly are the idiosyncratic individual stories that anthropologists regularly encounter in their fieldwork, accounts of experience considered to be peculiar to their storytellers. Folk narratives, in contrast, are ostensibly those shared tales of experience common to a group or culture. They are part of the narrative tradition and, in their telling, are a cultural accounting of the experiences in question. But, as Narayan and George explain, in their respective attempts to obtain life stories from respondents in various parts of the globe, what was personal and what was folk was never clearly demarcated. Individual respondents made use of what was shared to represent themselves as individuals, so that, narratively, who any “one” was, was mediated artfully by various applications of common usage. In turn, the cultural particulars embodied in folktales were constantly being applied in both old and new ways in personal accounts. Biography and culture, in other words, were mutually implicative and alive in their narrative renderings; their interviews both reproduced and invented participants' lives (see also Abu-Lughod 1993; Behar 1993; Degh 1969; Narayan 1997).

In some sense, then, although the aim of empowering respondents is certainly attractive and to be encouraged in principle, interview participants are always already “empowered” to engage artfully in a vast range of discursive practices. Even “asymmetrical” interview conversations require the active involvement of both parties. Although interview preferences and politics move in various directions, interview participants nonetheless actively and artfully engage the auspices of the interview and their own biographies at many levels. As Foucault might put it, power is everywhere in the interview's exploration and explication of experience. Even the standardized survey interview, which seemingly allocates all power to the researcher, deploys it elsewhere in the collaboratively constructive vocalization of “individual” opinion.

Interviewing as Cultural Production

The interview is certainly more than what it seemed to be at the start of this chapter; we have taken it well beyond a simple and self-evident encounter between interviewer and respondent. As we moved from the individual interview to the interview society, we noted that the interview is among our most commonplace means for constructing individualized experience. We recognized, too, that by virtue of our widespread participation in interviews, each and every one of us is implicated in the production of who and what we are as the collection of individual subjects that populate our lives.

Of course, interviewing is found in places where it has been for decades, such as in applying for jobs, in clinical encounters, and in the telephone surveys of public opinion polling. But it has also penetrated formerly hidden spaces, such as the foothills of the Himalayas and the everyday worlds of children and the seriously ill. Interviews are everywhere these days, as researchers pursue respondents to the ends of the earth, as we offer our opinions and preferences to pollsters, in Internet questionnaires, and to marketing researchers, as we bare our souls to therapists and healers in the “privacy” of the clinic as well as in the mass media.

With its penetration and globalization, the interview has become a worldwide form of cultural production. Regardless of social venue or geographic location characteristics that were once argued to be empirically distinct or interpersonally isolating the methodical application of interview technology is bringing us into a single world of accounts and accountability. Despite its community borders and national and linguistic boundaries, it is a world that can be described in the common language of sample characteristics and whose subjectivities can be represented in terms of individualized voices. Whereas we once might have refrained from examining Asian village women's stories in relation to the accounts of their urban European counterparts because the two groups were understood to be culturally and geographically distinct the women's ability to respond to interviews now makes it possible for us to compare their experiences in the same methodological terms.

The interview is such a common information-gathering procedure that it seems to bring all experience together narratively. Of course, there are technical challenges and local narrative solutions that cannot be overlooked. But technology is only the procedural scaffolding of what is a broad culturally productive enterprise. More and more, the interview society provides both a sense of who we are and the method by which we represent ourselves and our experiences. This returns us to the leading theme of this *Handbook*: The interview is part and parcel of society, not simply a mode of inquiry into and about society. If it is part of, not just a conduit to, our personal lives, then we might well entertain the possibility that the interview's ubiquity serves to produce communicatively and ramify the very culture it ostensibly only inquires about.

It is in the spirit of this cultural, as well as its constituent technical, activity that this *Handbook* is presented. As the contributors deftly describe the interview's varied modalities, distinctive respondents, technical dimensions, auspices, analytic strategies, and reflections and representations, they also specify the most common procedural facilitator for the expression of experience of our times.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412973588.n3>