

# Guide to Interview Guides and Interviewing

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# Research Process

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- ▶ Research question
- ▶ Operationalization: create interview guide
- ▶ Sampling
- ▶ Details to plan for:
  - ▶ IRB
  - ▶ Consent form
  - ▶ Compensation
  - ▶ Recording
- ▶ Data Collection
- ▶ Transcription
- ▶ Analysis
- ▶ Writing!



# Two Examples

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- ▶ Sex work as a supplement to low-wage labor
- ▶ The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the financial lives of the working poor



# Sampling

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- ▶ Random Sampling
- ▶ Purposive Sampling
  - ▶ In qualitative work, we are often sampling on the dependent variable – this is on purpose!
- ▶ Snowball Sampling
- ▶ Point-of-view sampling



# Interview style

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- ▶ Survey-style
- ▶ Structured
- ▶ Semi-structured
- ▶ Open-ended



# The Instrument: Operationalizing your research question

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- ▶ Take your research question and ask yourself: What kind of evidence do I need to answer my research question?
- ▶ Interviews are good at:
  - ▶ Understanding your respondent's subjective experiences
  - ▶ Understanding what your respondent *think*
  - ▶ Understanding your respondent *thinks* about what other people *do*
- ▶ They are OK at:
  - ▶ Understanding what your respondent *does*
- ▶ They are NOT good at:
  - ▶ Documenting large-scale trends
  - ▶ Understanding *other* people's subjective experiences
  - ▶ Understanding what *other* people *do* or *think*



# 5 Principles

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- ▶ Research questions are not the same as interview questions
- ▶ If you ask a question, they will answer it
- ▶ People's espoused theories differ from their theories-in-use
- ▶ Interviews are social occasions
- ▶ Testimony by itself is relatively weak form of evidence

# 1. Research questions are not the same as interview questions

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- ▶ Ask “how,” not “why” questions
  - ▶ Ex: “how did you come to move here? Tell me the whole story”
  - ▶ NOT “why did you move here?”
- ▶ Don’t ask your respondent to analyze your data for you
  - ▶ Separate sociological concepts from “folk” concepts



## 2. If you ask a question, they will answer it

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- ▶ **Use probes:**
  - ▶ Clarify
    - ▶ Say what you mean by [term or phrase]
    - ▶ When you say, [term or phrase], what are you actually doing?
    - ▶ It sounds like you are saying, "...". Is that a fair summary?
  - ▶ Get more detail
    - ▶ Tell me more about that.
    - ▶ Can you give me an example?
    - ▶ What would that look like?
  - ▶ Test a counterfactual
- ▶ **Get back to the guide after a digression**



### 3. People's espoused theories differ from their theories-in-practice

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- ▶ **Get them to tell a story**
  - ▶ Ask “how” questions not “do”
  - ▶ Use “tell me about” and “tell me more about that”
  - ▶ Use open-ended questions
- ▶ **Approach your topic sideways**
- ▶ **Don't take the first answer as a final answer**
  - ▶ Ask for elaboration
  - ▶ Ask for counter-examples
  - ▶ Ask if their rationale is all-encompassing



## 4. Interviews are social occasions

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### Establish rapport

- ▶ Comment on objects you see in their house
- ▶ Try to find a way to connect with them at the beginning
- ▶ Let them know you are comfortable talking about anything

### OK, so they are very weird social occasions...

- ▶ Train your respondent in level of detail
- ▶ Use social barriers to your advantage



## 5. Testimony by itself is relatively weak form of evidence

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- ▶ Ask “how,” not “why”
  - ▶ “Why” elicits a reason or an explanation, this is not usually how people think
- ▶ Ask the same question in different ways in order to gain multiple forms of evidence
  - ▶ Positive and negative formulations
  - ▶ Hypotheticals / vignettes



# Kathy's 12 Commandments

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- ▶ Memorize the instrument
- ▶ Train your respondent
- ▶ Don't ask questions that can be answered in 1 or 2 words
- ▶ Don't apologize, ask for what you want!
- ▶ Don't ask, instruct (command!)
- ▶ Ask one question at a time; get the detail in the probes
- ▶ Ask questions that can be answered
- ▶ Repeat, and redirect
- ▶ Use your naïveté to your advantage
- ▶ Ask *how*, not *why* questions
- ▶ Make people *respondents*, not *key informants* (individuals are unreliable)
- ▶ Don't ask respondents to be analysts



# Weird things that might happen in an interview...

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| Weird thing                              | Solution                                     |
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| They might cry                           | Bring tissues                                |
| You might feel uncomfortable or offended | Try to understand where they are coming from |
| They might ask you a personal question   | Answer it! (or don't)                        |
| You might cry                            | Bring tissues                                |
| Other weird things?                      | ?  |



# Interview Practice

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- ▶ Pair up with someone who fits your profile, introduce the study
- ▶ Give feedback as a respondent:
  - ▶ How did the questions feel to you?
  - ▶ Was anything unclear? Uncomfortable?
  - ▶ What suggestions do you have?
  - ▶ What would you add?
- ▶ Convene as a class and discuss

