

14.1 Survey Types and Strengths/ Limitation of Face-to-Face Interview Survey

A. Survey types and the place of the face-to-face survey

Of the several ways to conduct survey research, the face-to-face interview is the oldest, followed by the self-administered paper questionnaire, with the mail questionnaire close behind. Survey researchers increasingly rely on modes of administration that employ new technologies, such as telephones, computer-assisted interviewing, and Internet-web methods. With the move to survey modes with new technology, Why should we continue to use the face-to-face interview rather than other modes of administration? The face-to-face interview has its limitations but under certain conditions, it has significant advantages over non-interview surveys and over interviews not conducted in person.

B. Face-to-face strengths

Direct human contact is the primary strength of the face-to-face interview. The researcher, or a trained interviewer, personally meets, sees, talks

with, and listens to a respondent. Direct human interaction increases respondent cooperation and motivation. Face-to-face surveys have the highest response rates. Respondents find it more difficult to turn down a person standing at the doorway than to toss a mail questionnaire into the trash, hang up the phone, or click to a different computer screen. Krysan et al. (1994) found different types of people may respond or fail to respond to different modes of survey administration (mail versus face-to-face). Lower income, less educated, and minority populations are less likely to participate in non face-to-face modes.

Once an interviewer has gained entry and initial cooperation, mainstream norms of politeness and hospitality encourage continued interaction. The face-to-face format permits the longest survey interviews. A skilled interviewer can stimulate and involve a respondent, build a sense of trust, and create rapport factors that encourage respondents to provide honest answers and disclose information. Respondents who might otherwise be difficult to engage fully in a survey interview can become absorbed, cooperative participants with face-to-face interaction. Not surprisingly, respondents report higher satisfaction with the survey process when interviewed face-to-face rather than by telephone or Web surveys (Holbrook et al. 2003).

Human contact with an interviewer, usually in a respondent's home environment, also provides opportunities for interviewer observation. In other survey modes, a respondent could lie or be deceptive about obvious, visible facts without

W. L. Neuman (✉)
Department of Sociology,
Anthropology and Criminal Justice ,
Asian Studies, University of Wisconsin-Whitewater,
Whitewater, WI, USA
e-mail: neumanl@uww.edu

detection. In the face-to-face interview, an interviewer can observe the respondent's physical characteristics (e.g., skin tone, apparent age, outward gender expression), be attentive to non-verbal clues, and note surroundings. Such details can be significant contextual data unavailable via a telephone interview or Web survey. Was the respondent located in a dingy apartment located on street filled with abandoned cars and boarded up buildings as gun shots are heard in the background or in a spacious, plush mansion with servants located on a huge manicured estate surrounded by a wall?

Computer-assisted Web surveys can show respondents photos, charts, and so forth, but the face-to-face interview offers the greatest flexibility to show charts, photos, and such. If a survey asks a respondent to react to a complex array of visual images or physical objects (e.g., which of these two hand-held remote controls is better for you?), the face-to-face interview is the most effective mode of administration. Dillman and Christian (2005) warn that survey mode differences (e.g., among mail, face-to-face interview, phone interview) can produce substantial differences in respondent answers, especially when using visual presentations. They found large differences by presentation mode when showing different five-point satisfaction scales to respondents.

The face-to-face survey also facilitates interviewers using *probes* to inquire about ambiguous or unclear respondent answers, offering clarifying explanations of complex survey questions, or providing gentle assistance (e.g., helping an elderly person sit down). Sometimes eye contact, a shift in tone of voice, or a smile can ease tension, facilitate understanding, and move the interview process forward. Such human contact extends beyond greater respondent cooperation to improve measurement validity. The respondent who answers with a quizzical facial expression or appears hesitant or unclear about how to interpret a survey question may be able to correctly interpret the survey question as a researcher intended and provided a recognizable, accurate answer if a warm and compassionate interviewer offers assistance.

C. Face-to-face limitations

High costs are a major limitation of the face-to-face interview, because it can cost five or ten times more than alternative modes and take much longer to complete. We face a tradeoff between low-cost, fast modes of survey administration that yield acceptable response rates and data quality, and the high-cost, slow face-to-face survey interview that provides the highest response rates and the richest, most complete data.

Another limitation involves the interviewer. As Tourangeau (2004, p. 790) remarked, "... the big drawback to face-to-face interviews is the interviewer... Interviewers can be both a blessing and a curse." More than other modes, the face-to-face interview has the greatest potential for "interviewer effects" that become "interview bias." Compared to other modes, the face-to-face survey also increases a respondent's tendency to give "socially desirable" i.e., expected, normative answers, and to hide embarrassing personal details (see Holbrook et al. 2003 for contrary evidence). Potential interviewer effects require longer and more careful interviewer training than for other survey interviewing. Again, we face a tradeoff. Direct interaction with another person may best engage, motivate, and assist respondents, and it also carries the greatest potential to influence respondent answers and behaviors.

Survey administration is more complex with a face-to-face survey than with the alternatives. Administrative complexity, in addition to longer interviewer training and involvement, adds to high costs. The face-to-face survey often requires more attempts to contact a respondent prior to the interview because it requires gaining physical access to a respondent. The costs in time, money, and interviewer effort for multiple contacts add up. After locating a respondent, additional costs include transporting, housing, feeding, and preparing the interviewer. A face-to-face interview also introduces potential safety or security concerns avoided by other modes of administration. There are also administrative "overhead" costs to supervise and monitor sending interviewers to diverse geographic

locations and oversee transportation and budget details.

14.2 Models of Face-to-Face Survey Process

A. *The process of a face-to-face survey*

The face-to-face survey is both a mode of survey research and a type of interview. From both perspectives, it is a multi-phase process that centers on a short-term social interaction between two strangers, an interviewer and respondent. However, the total process includes other people and phases prior to or after the interview encounter. Most prior phases parallel to other modes of survey administration, such as research question clarification, survey question writing, questionnaire layout and design, questionnaire pilot testing, sampling, and respondent contact. For example, question design will vary depending on whether a survey is Web-based or uses face-to-face interviews. Likewise, interviewer training will differ depending on whether face-to-face versus telephone interviewing is used. Such differences are minor, and the major difference involves what takes place during an interview. Next, we consider the interview phase.

1. *The Interview as a type of social interaction*

An interview is a special type of social interaction. As Schaeffer and Presser (2003, p. 65) remarked, "... the standardized survey interview is a distinct genre of interaction with unique rules, but it shares many features with ordinary interaction because social and conversational norms as well as processes of comprehension, memory, and the like are imported into the interview from the situations in which they are learned and practiced." Implicit in best practices for conducting a face-to-face survey is some model of the interview as a special social encounter with a specific purpose and structure.

All interviews (e.g., clinical or medical, therapeutic, police interrogation or investigative, entertainment, job application, journalistic) are distinct social interactions and speech events. They obey different rules from ordinary social

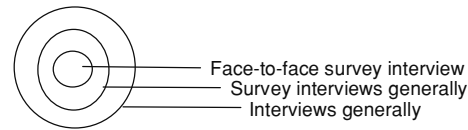


Fig. 14.1 The context of face-to-face survey interviews

encounters and conversations. In an ordinary conversation, each participant equally asks or answers questions and either participant can introduce new topics, change direction, or digress. In interviews, one participant, the interviewer, asks questions, controls new topic introduction, monitors the pace and direction of the interchange, and restricts digressions. The other participant only provides answers.

A survey research interview differs from other interviews. Kahn and Cannell (1957, p. 16) defined the survey interview as, "a specialized pattern of verbal interaction—initiated for a specific purpose, and focused on some specific content area, with consequent elimination of extraneous material... the role relationship of the interviewer and respondent is highly specialized..." Interviews in general, the survey interview as a type of interview, and the face-to-face survey interview follow increasingly distinct rules, operating within one another like a set of concentric circles (see Fig. 14.1).

To begin, we examine how the interview differs from non-interview social interactions or conversations. Next, we consider how the survey-research interview differs from other interviews. Last, we focus on concerns unique to the face-to-face compared to other survey interviews.

The interview has the following six distinctive characteristics:

- *Recognized institutionalized roles* Each party to the interview is assigned an institutionalized identity and role. One is the interviewer, with an active authoritative questioner role. The other is the respondent, with a passive answerer role. Although other people may be involved (e.g., supporter, observer, assistant, ally), these are the two principal roles of the interview encounter.
- *A task-governed, controlled agenda* The encounter follows a formal or informal script

or sequence with a “task” to accomplish. The agenda may be prefixed or flexible and interactive, but the occupant of the interviewer role constrains or controls the encounter, directs flow of events (e.g., when it starts or ends, when it changes direction), and moves the encounter from a beginning toward an ending or conclusion phase.

- *A restricted range of topics* The encounter has a bounded range of topics. The type of interview and its purpose will constrain the topics expected or permitted, and define “off limits” or forbidden topics. Each party to the encounter has some influence over the appropriate topic range, but the interviewer has far greater control.
- *An appropriate set of behaviors* An interview situation has implicit rules of appropriate behavior. The rules include the acceptability or non-acceptability of physical touching, making eye contact, physical movements, physical distance between persons, loudness of speech, use of obscenities, ability to take notes or make recordings, and so forth.
- *A question–answer interactional sequence* Central to the interview interaction is a turn-taking sequence in which one role occupant asks questions and the other provides answers. The exact form varies, but there is a fundamental imbalance in verbal behavior between the occupants of the two major roles.
- *A bounded encounter* The interview encounter can vary in length. It may be a one-time event or a set of repeated events. However, it is distinct, separate interaction and not part of an on-going, open-ended social relationship. It usually involves strangers or non-intimates and is bounded by a specific purpose and limited duration.

Each participant brings to the interview a set of expectations and assumptions about the appropriate behaviors, topics, and ways of conversing. Capable adults have learned about the interview interaction informally by observing others, viewing media presentations, or hearing casual explanations from others about what to expect. Most occupants of the dominant (interviewer) role received some formal instruction,

while occupants of the subordinate (respondent) role only learn about the interview and its expectations of them informally. They rarely receive a formal script or written instructions about how they are to behave.

Most capable adults recognize the variety of interviews that take place in a modern, bureaucratic society and are aware that the purpose, degree of trust, formality, and so forth vary by type of interview. For example, asking about intimate details of one’s body or personal hygiene behaviors may be appropriate for a medical interview but not in a job interview. A person may be cautious about revealing potentially incriminating information in an interrogation interview by a police detective more than in a confidential therapeutic interview with a psychiatrist or priest/minister/rabbi. Although their interview knowledge may be incomplete or partly accurate and acquired informally without uniform experiences, most adults know basic interview rules and expectations as a specific type of social interaction and distinguish among interview types.

2. Survey research interview

A survey research interview differs from other types in purpose, respondent and interviewer roles, and standardization.

a. Purpose Other interviews screen or rate potential applicants, identify personal concerns to provide tailored assistance, or investigate suspicion of criminal behavior. The purpose of a survey interview is to gather information on a respondent (or a respondent’s situation). The requested information can be broad—life history, family background, characteristics such as schooling or income, personal beliefs and attitudes, dreams and aspirations, social relationships, intimate behaviors, and daily habits. Survey interviews solicit information to acquire scientifically relevant knowledge, and in the process, a respondent becomes only a data source for researcher-defined purposes. Respondents are rarely aware of the researcher’s interest, needs, and purposes even when deception is not part of a research design. Survey researchers treat respondents as contributors to a larger pool of data. They detach and abstract the data from the individual respondent, stripping

away a web of intimate contextual details that comprise a person's biographical life. They then merge the abstracted data with data taken from other respondents. Next, they apply statistical or other data analysis without further respondent input or participation. The respondent loses ownership and is barred from altering or viewing the raw data he or she contributed.

For example, a survey researcher asks about schooling in an interview to acquire data for a theoretically defined variable, educational attainment. The researcher ignores biographic details of a particular respondent's schooling (e.g., particular courses taken, grades received, classroom experiences, co-curricular activities, and so forth), and removes isolated information about a person (e.g., years of schooling completed). Stripped of the embedded biographic context and removed from the interactional encounter of the interview, survey researchers merge abstracted individual data with that taken from other respondents. They then manipulate the merged data to test hypotheses, construct models of human behavior, advance theoretical knowledge, and so forth. All this occurs outside the direct awareness, control or involvement of the respondent who supplied the original information.

b. Roles The structure and norms of the survey interview encounter proscribe respondent and interviewer roles and assign behavioral expectations to each. Interviewer role expectations include being warm, polite, and considerate, and to display modest affective expressions that are simultaneously "professional" i.e., neutral and detached. The role's professional, detached data-gatherer dimension requires role occupants to be careful, deliberate, focused, and task-oriented. An interviewer maintains continuous control over the interaction, including its content, pace, and direction. An interviewer guides, encourages, and cajoles the respondent into compliance with the information extraction task, simultaneously disciplining, instructing, and motivating the respondent.

In addition to the respondent and interviewer the interview involves a third party, the survey researcher who designs the study, provides

questions, and orchestrates the process (see Zouwen et al. 2010, p. 72). An interviewer may control what occurs in an interview interaction, but the unseen, non-present researcher is directing the interviewer's actions. The interviewer only represents or is a surrogate for the absent survey researcher. The researcher provides an interviewer with employment, selects which respondents to interview, stipulates interview behavior, supplies the questions to ask, and instructs how answers are to be recorded. Like a hidden puppeteer, the researcher pulls an interviewer-accomplice's strings to extract desired information from respondents.

The proscribed survey interviewer role is to be a detached professional, diligent and meticulous employee, and warm friendly motivator. The respondent role is to be a cooperative, candid, and honest information source. The ideal respondent is compliant, answers every question honestly, and discloses personal information accurately and fully. He or she is interested, attentive and informed, and correctly interprets every survey question exactly as intended by the researcher through the intermediary of an interviewer. The respondent expects nothing in return for supplying survey researchers with data.

3. The standardized format

To understand the practice of survey interviewing, we first should step back and recognize that survey research is part of a larger historic enterprise or "project" of the modern era. The project is to gather objectified data about people, including their characteristics, behaviors, feelings and attitudes for use by experts and bureaucratic officials who acquire knowledge on, advance and test theories about, and make decisions regarding social-political issues (see Alonso and Starr 1987; Gubrium and Holstein 2002). Persons with official or expert authority use the extracted abstract information for their own purposes. Gubrium and Holstein (2002, p. 13) called this the "vessel-of-answers model" of the respondent. In it, the respondent is a passive subject who supplies detailed intimate information that is subsequently removed from her/his control. Few active social researchers debate such meta-methodological

issues (for exceptions see Barnes 1979; Burawoy 2005; Clawson et al. 2007).

Over time, survey researchers shifted survey practice to be more rule-based, explicit, and standardized. As they sought to create a more positivist “scientific” and objective method for collecting data, they increasingly standardized procedures. This produced more objectified data that better fit the paradigmatic assumptions of positivist social science. We can view the standardized format survey as part of a larger historical movement to produce objective, quantifiable knowledge about the social-political world, or what Porter (1995) astutely described as “mechanical objectivity.”

Mechanical objectivity makes us follow explicit data collection rules that are neutral and fair. Its purpose is to remove what may be considered subjective personal moral judgments about individuals and yield objective, quantifiable information consistent with positivist scientific or bureaucratic purposes (see Schaeffer and Maynard 2002).

a. Why standardize?

Early survey interviews were ad hoc and idiosyncratic, varying greatly by interviewer. Gradually, survey researchers learned that different interviewers could substantially influence the survey data. Suchman and Jordan (1990, p. 233) observed, “... the constraints on the interview are all imposed in the interest of standardization. Standardization is what identifies the interview process as a scientific procedure.” The reason for standardizing is to control interviewer effects that can arise in two ways.

A first way arises from behavioral variation across specific interviewers. This can introduce unwanted variation into the data. Positivist-oriented survey researchers are only interested in data variation caused by different respondent answers, and seek data variation that reflects actual variation among respondent attitudes, behaviors, or characteristics. They treat other sources of data variation, such as that from specific interviewers, as sources of measurement error.

A second way interviewers can influence data arises from an interviewer’s personal opinions, attitudes, and expectations about a respondent.

“Standardization addresses both components of interview error. The rules of standardization attempt to hold the behavior of the interviewer constant, thereby reducing variable error... Standardization also reduces bias by reducing the number of opportunities for interviewer expectations or opinions to intrude on the process by which the respondent’s answer is generated” (Maynard and Schaeffer 2002, pp. 5–6).

Thus, by standardizing the survey researchers try to remove interviewer variation and make the specific interviewer irrelevant to data collection. They assume that such variation represents unwanted “noise” or “error.” Standardizing interviewer behavior is just part of standardizing the entire survey process, including questions and respondent actions. In a standardized interview, an interviewer does the following (Schaeffer and Maynard 2002, p. 580): read each question neutrally and exactly as written by the researcher, follow question sequences or branches in question order as directed without deviation, use only acceptable non-directive probes for inadequate respondent answers, record respondent answers without interviewer discretion, and be non-judgmental toward all respondent answers. This supposedly eliminates or reduces interviewer influence and pushes respondent replies into a predetermined range for easy data analysis.

In the standardized interview format, interviewers repeat each question word-by-word without variation in a specified sequence while respondents select from preset choices, unless an open-ended option is offered. It rests on the assumption that variations in question wording, question sequencing, interviewer behavior, or non-conforming respondent answers are potential sources of measurement error, errors that could invalidate the survey data. The underlying goal is to extract data in an uncontaminated antiseptic manner from a conforming, complacent respondent, much as one might extract a DNA or blood sample from an inert patient for subsequent analysis.

A model of how to conduct face-to-face survey interviews rests on assumptions from one of two alternative survey research paradigms. The two paradigms come from different epistemological

assumptions (positivist and interpretative) (see Della Porta and Keating 2008; Neuman 2011, pp. 90–119; Steinmerz 2005). We next examine the two survey paradigms.

b. The stimulus-response, information retrieval paradigm

The dominant, conventional paradigm relies on paired stimulus (question from interviewer) and response (answer from respondent) model. As Mishler (1986, pp. 14–15) observed, “... by and large, research on problems of the interview has been framed with the stimulus–response paradigm... The intent... is to find ways to standardize the stimulus, or perhaps a better term, to neutralize it. That is, the aim is to ascertain respondent’s ‘true’ opinions and minimize possible distortions and biases in responses that may result from question or interviewer variables that interfere with the respondents’ ability or wishes to express their ‘real’ or ‘true’ views.” The stimulus–response, information retrieval (SRIR) paradigm uses a naïve assumption model of the interview (Foddy 1993, p. 13). Its assumptions are naïve due to a simplistic and non-problematic view of the survey interview and include the following:

- (1) Researchers have clearly conceptualized all variables into specific survey questions;
- (2) Effects due to wording bias or question order have been removed from survey questions;
- (3) The process of being interviewed and the specific interviewer and interview interaction have no effect on the respondent or his/her answers, and
- (4) All respondents (a) are highly motivated and willing to answer any question asked, (b) possess complete information and can accurately answer all questions asked, (c) understand the questions exactly as they are asked, (d) give truthful answers when they do not know the researcher’s hypotheses and have no hints or suggestions from interviewers, and (e) give answers in an interview that perfectly match their true attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs.

Although some survey researchers have questioned the degree to which specific assumptions hold, mainstream survey research proceeds as if they hold true most, if not all the time. To examine seriously such assumptions might disrupt the enterprise of survey research and raise questions about the validity of the data routinely used by social scientists and bureaucratic organizations. The primary advance in the SRIR paradigm has been to move beyond a simple behaviorist “black box” view of respondent mental processes and into cognitive information processing models (Sudman et al. 1996). In recent decades, survey researchers have explored the mental processes a respondent applies when retrieving information relevant to the survey question (stimulus) and providing a response (see Tourangeau et al. 2000).

c. An constructionist, collaborative paradigm

An alternative paradigm views the survey interview less as an individualized stimulus–response, information-retrieval process than as a special kind of social encounter, one that obeys some but not all the rules of a conversation. Schegloff (1990, p. 248) termed this “talk-in-interaction.” In contrast to the SRIR paradigm, the alternative constructionist, collaborative (CC) paradigm holds that, “an interview no matter how standardized, remains fundamentally a linguistic and interactional event” (Suchman and Jordan 1990, p. 240). The CC paradigm treats the interview primarily as an interactional encounter between two persons who collaborate to construct meaning through a fluid, dynamic exchange. In this exchange, “interviewers, along with respondents, deploy resources of an interactional substrate-basics skills for engaging meaningfully-in pursuit of answers. These skills are presumed by and yet largely ignored in the rules of standardized interviewing” (Maynard and Schaeffer 2002, p. 9). To accomplish a meaningful interchange, respondent and interviewer work together, deploying tacit practices to handle unforeseen, unpredictable events (see Gathman et al. 2008; Lavin and Maynard 2001).

In the SRIR paradigm, the survey interview is understood as an individual cognitive retrieval process. By contrast, the CC paradigm views it as social interaction in which two people mutually generate meaning in a constrained social situation through on-going conversational dynamics.

In the CC paradigm, interview participants draw on an array of social skills and resources from ordinary life and daily conversations to generate situation-specific meanings. Like other human interchanges, the interview is a fluid encounter filled with opportunities for interactional slippage and misunderstanding. Luckily, people possess a variety of skills and interactional resources that they can draw upon to repair, correct, and realign communication flows and thereby construct mutual understanding. Schober and Conrad (2002, p. 75) contrasted the SRIR paradigm, or message model, with the CC paradigm. In the CC paradigm, "conversational partners provide each other with evidence of whether the conversation is on track—whether they are understanding one another well enough for current purposes... the theory of standardization assumes a view of communication, the message model, that does not hold in spontaneous conversation..."

In the CC paradigm, an interview extends processes already present in ordinary conversation rather than blocking them as occurs in the standardized survey format. The CC paradigm supports use of a "conversational" or "flexible" format interview (see Tourangeau et al. 2000, pp. 56–59). Taking the CC paradigm seriously would force a major re-examination of the standardized format along with its goal of eliminating from the interviewer-respondent interaction what it considers to be "measurement error."

Paradoxically, the interactional skills and interpersonal resources that the CC paradigm treats as essential for achieving a meaningful survey interview are what the SRIR paradigm seeks to control, restrict, or eliminate through standardization. "Compared with ordinary conversation, the survey interview suppresses those interactional resources that routinely mediate

uncertainty of relevance and interpretation" (Suchman and Jordan 1992, p. 242). The two paradigms suggest different interviewer behaviors. The chart below compares the paradigms on three features, proscribed interviewer behavior, assumptions about the questioning process, and assumptions about respondent answering.

Feature	Paradigm of survey interview	
	Stimulus–response, information retrieval	Constructivist, collaborative
Proscribed interviewer behavior	Behavior is uniform and standardized with exact wording. Interviewers are to follow a script closely and use minimal, preset probes.	Interaction is conversational and flexible with active rewording. Interviewers seek to convey authentic intention and meanings from the researcher and use extended, tailored probes.
Assumption of questioning process in the interview	A proper stimulus will elicit an appropriate mental task and verbal response by the respondent. The researcher creates the stimulus and the interviewer is only a neutral conveyor of it.	The interviewer and respondent engage in a mutual collaboration relying on verbal/non-verbal interaction skills and resources. Together they try to create a shared understanding of the researcher's intended meaning and appropriate responses to it.
Assumption of answering process in the interview	Respondent interprets a standard question as worded with restricted	Respondent constructs, jointly with the interviewer, a meaningful answer that both

(continued)

interviewer behavior then internally formulates an appropriate response (more than once if necessary) then delivers it for acceptance.	addresses the requirements of the survey question and constraints of the interview situation.
---	---

14.3 Survey Questions Specific to Face-to-Face Surveys

A. General Survey Question Writing Principles

Dozens of books describe how to write survey questionnaires (see Babbie 1990; Bradburn and Sudman 1988; Dillman 2000; Czaja and Blair 2005; Fowler 2009; Oishi 2002; Rossi et al. 1983; Sudman and Bradburn 1983 as examples). The following section will review a few basics and focus on issues relevant to the face-to-face survey interview. Writing good survey questions takes practice and is a mixture of art and science, as discussed by Gideon earlier in Chap. 7. A “good” question is easily comprehensible to respondents; it unambiguously and clearly communicates the survey researcher’s intent. Three principles guide writing good survey questions for the face-to-face interview, whichever paradigm is used:

- (1) Keep the respondent’s perspective in mind. Avoid questions that might confuse or frustrate respondents. This means exercising care if the respondents are heterogeneous, have life situations very different from the researcher, or have priorities other than completing a survey research interview.
- (2) Keep the interviewer in mind. Interviewers are allies who act as intermediates between the researcher and respondent. Provide specific directions to guide the interviewer and to make it easy to follow a researcher’s intent in a dynamic face-to-face situation.
- (3) Treat the entire interview schedule/questionnaire as an integrated whole, with a start and finish, and the questions flowing smoothly from one to another.

The first principle is critical. Survey questions should be clear, relevant, and meaningful to all respondents. However, we face a dilemma. If respondents have diverse social backgrounds and deploy varying frames of reference, using identical question wording may not carry an identical meaning for all respondents. Wording that some respondents find clear may create confusion for others due to differences in language usage/vocabulary, frames of reference, or life situations. As Schober and Conrad (1997) noted, misunderstandings can arise because a researcher’s concepts may not map well onto a respondent’s circumstances. The issue is especially important for non-mainstream respondents (i.e., not white, middle-class heterosexuals) and people whose subjective, lived reality does not mesh well with most mainstream survey researchers. “Conceiving of a ‘standardized’ subject behind the respondent casts the subject as a mere vessel of answers that can only be expressed in conventional terms, in relation to the standards that are assumed to be in place. This cheats the experiences of those whose lives are not lived in accord with, or may even be lived against the standard” (Dunbar et al. 2002, p. 295). Whether it is a group of elites (see Odenahl and Shaw 2002) or marginalized members of society, the great diversity of respondent lived experience and social position may not mesh well with using a single standardized survey for everyone.

Survey question writing takes skill, practice, patience, and creativity. The following list of ten things to avoid when writing survey questions includes only frequent potential problems—avoid jargon, slang, and abbreviations; avoid ambiguity, confusion, and vagueness; avoid emotional language and prestige bias; avoid double-barreled questions; avoid leading questions; avoid questions beyond respondents’ capabilities; avoid false premises; avoid asking about distant future intentions; avoid double negatives; and avoid overlapping or unbalanced response categories. Such lists are framed as things to avoid, because studies to improve survey research focus on question problems and warn

against what not to do, while their proscriptive advice is general and vague.

B. Interview Schedule Design Principles

Interview schedule design includes the following four issues: layout, interview flow, interviewer instructions, and data recording.

1. Layout An interviewer has an interview schedule in front of him/her during the interview. It is simultaneously a script of what to say to a respondent, a map to guide the interview process, and an instrument for data gathering. Graphic layout concerns, such as font size, use of lines and diagrams, and placement of white space should make everything easy and clear for the interviewer. An interviewer might be in a calm, quiet setting with a serious, attentive respondent or in a noisy, confusing, fast-changing social situation with an annoyed, distracted respondent. A layout should support and assist the interviewer in the worst of situations. A layout that seems clear and straightforward under ideal conditions can easily become unintentionally confusing with unclear contingency/skip questions, difficult to convey questions, and awkward response categories in the worst of situations. Besides being a script and data collection instrument, an interview schedule acts as a prop to reinforce the researcher's authoritative voice, and it can be a "security blanket" for the uncertain interviewer.

2. Flow All interview schedules have a beginning with an introduction, a sequence of topics and questions, and a closing. Between the beginning and closing, the schedule guides the interview's pace and flow. After an introduction explaining the survey, it is best to make opening questions pleasant, interesting, and easy to answer (see Chap. 6 by Stalans on framing and the importance of introduction to the survey process). This helps respondents feel comfortable with the questionnaire, the interviewer, and the interview process. It is best to avoid asking many boring background questions or sensitive issue questions at the beginning. It is important to organize questions into common topics. Mixing questions on different topics creates unnecessary confusion. A good interview schedule orients respondents by grouping questions

on the same topic together. Ideally, the interviewer's script introduces each section with a short introductory statement (e.g., "Now I would like to ask you questions about housing"). Question topics should flow smoothly and logically to assist respondents' memory and comfort levels. As the interview moves toward the closing, avoid frightening, embarrassing, or upsetting respondents with many sensitive issue questions. It is always best to end with a "thank you" and an offer to address any respondent concerns or questions.

3. Instructions Interviewer instructions are essential; however, instruction that are highly cryptic or overly elaborate can be worse than no instructions. Instructions should be in a different font/color for easy identification. Four types of interviewer instructions include the following: (1) instructions about introducing the survey or its sections (e.g., Hand the respondent the informed consent form and wait several minutes for her/him to read it, then ask whether there are any questions about it); (2) instructions about interview flow and direction (e.g., now show respondent Fig. 14.1, if yes is answered skip to next page question 4, tell the respondent "thank you, we have everything we need"); (3) instructions about respondent behavior or reactions (e.g., if respondent hesitates, appears confused, or appears uncertain, pause 10 seconds then offer this alternative wording); (4) instructions about using probes when respondents give incomplete or highly ambiguous answers (e.g., if respondent fails to give a complete answer, pause then repeat the question a second time, if still unclear ask "could you tell me more about that").

4. Data Researchers think ahead to data recording and analysis as they prepare an interview schedule/questionnaire. Interviewer errors often involve mistakes in marking respondent answers, so clear and easy to mark check boxes for closed-ended responses are best. Interviewer training usually drills in the importance of accuracy and completeness in recording respondent answers. Open-ended answers require extra attention. It is important to offer sufficient space and allot time if interviewers are

to write in open-ended responses. The interviewer must listen carefully, have legible writing, and record what a respondent says verbatim without editing, correcting grammar, or removing slang. The interviewer should never summarize or paraphrase since this causes a loss of information or distorts answers. For example, the respondent says, "I'm really concerned about my daughter's heart problem. She's only 10 years old and already she has trouble climbing stairs. I don't know what she'll do when she gets older. Heart surgery is too risky for her and it costs so much. She'll have to learn to live with it." If the interviewer writes, "concerned about daughter's health," much is lost. Audio recordings have advantages (e.g., removes worry about time to write responses, missing full responses, illegible writing) and disadvantages (e.g., a recording may be obtrusive and threatening to respondents, may have mechanical problems, include background noise or garbled responses).

C. Social Desirability and Questions on Sensitive Topics

Direct human interaction intensifies two negative survey effects, social desirability, and threatening questions, i.e., questions on sensitive issues. Social desirability, or respondents giving what they believe to be socially acceptable, ideal, or normatively appropriate answers instead of the truth, is greater in face-to-face than other survey modes (Heerwegh 2009). It may be that the most honest responses come from anonymous (e.g., self-administration or computer-based) rather than from personal contact (e.g., phone or face-to-face interviews) modes of survey administration (see Tourangeau et al. 2010; Tourangeau and Smith 1996; Tourangeau and Yang 2007, but see Holbrook et al. 2003). Respondents may be reluctant to answer completely and truthfully questions about sensitive issues (i.e., sexual behavior, drug or alcohol use, mental health problems, law violations, or socially unpopular behavior) or ones that threaten their presentation of self. As Willson et al. (2009) suggested, some respondents answer questions based on a self-image as much as from their actual behaviors. Some qualitative researchers suggest self-

disclosure by the interviewer to elicit honest answers to sensitive issues (Dunbar et al. 2002; Reinharz and Chase 2002).

Survey researchers created an array of techniques to adjust question wording when respondents may hide or underreport behaviors or attitudes. In the face-to-face survey, interviewers can increase honest answering on sensitive issues in the following four ways: create comfort and trust, use enhanced phrasing, establish a desensitizing context, and use anonymous questioning methods. We briefly examine each next.

1. Create Comfort and Trust An interviewer can establish trust and a comfortable setting before asking threatening questions by displaying a calm, professional demeanor, reminding respondents of guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality, and emphasizing the need for honest answers. Researchers should place sensitive questions after a "warm-up period" of non-threatening questions and allow time for interviewers to establish rapport.

2. Use Enhanced Phrasing Indirectly asking about an issue may help to obtain honest answers. For example, instead of asking, "Have you shoplifted?"—which can carry an accusatory tone and uses the emotional word *shoplift*, that names an illegal act, interviewers might ask, "Have you even taken anything from a store without paying for it?" This describes the behavior, avoids emotional words, and opens the possibility that the behavior occurred under acceptable conditions (e.g., accidentally forgetting to pay).

3. Establish a Desensitizing Context Contextual information can reduce threat. One way is to first ask about more serious issues than ones of real interest. For example, a respondent may hesitate to answer a question about engaging in shoplifting, but if the same question follows a list of more serious crimes (e.g., armed robbery, burglary), shoplifting appears to be less serious. A respondent may answer honestly because in context shoplifting appears to be a minor, almost trivial offense.

4. Anonymous Answering Some researchers have the interviewer to carry a laptop computer or other answer-marking device. For sensitive

questions, the interviewer reads questions, but the respondent indicates answers to them, him or herself on a keyboard or other device out of the interviewer's line of vision and without giving a verbal response (Couper et al. 2003).

14.4 The Face-to-Face Interview Process

A. Interviewing in Survey Research

As noted above, the survey interview is a social interaction in which each participant has assigned roles and tasks. Interviewer role expectations are made explicit in formal training sessions but respondent expectations are less clear, and an interviewer may have to motivate, instruct, or guide respondents. The face-to-face survey mode best allows an interviewer to motivate, guide, reassure, and make "on the fly" adjustments based on respondent answers or inquiries.

B. Phases of the Survey Interview Process

1. *Introduction* An interview proceeds through stages, beginning with an introduction and entry. The interviewer gets in the door, shows authorization, and reassures and secures cooperation from the respondent. He or she is prepared for reactions such as "How did you pick me?" "What good will this do?" "I don't know about this." "What's this about, anyway?" The interviewer explains why he or she must interview a specific respondent and not a substitute. Couper (1997) found that introductory statements by interviewers had a large impact on respondent cooperation and data quality, but are little studied. A decade later, Blohm et al. (2007, p. 96) observed, "reasons for different response rates among interviewer are still not totally clear." Financial incentives to respondents appear to increase respondent participation without serious side effects (Davern et al. 2003), although interviewers may not endorse such incentive payments (Lynn 2001; also see Toepoel Chap. 13 for a more thorough discussion on the effects of incentives). Experience and more cooperative, extroverted interviewers

may reduce refusals (Sinibaldi et al. 2009) as well as "aversion training" for interviewers (Mayer and O'Brien 2001).

Two theories explain the initial cooperation-motivation process, Social Exchange and Leverage Saliency. *Social Exchange Theory* within the total design method (Dillman 2000) makes rational-choice assumptions and treats the interview as an exchange relationship in which respondents behave based on anticipated benefits for their efforts and cooperation. To increase cooperation and response rates, researchers should minimize the burdens by making participation easy and maximize rewards by providing benefits (i.e., feelings of esteem, material incentives, and emotional rewards) for cooperation.

Leverage Saliency Theory holds that a survey interview's salience varies by respondent (Groves et al. 2000). Respondents value, positively or negatively, specific aspects of the survey differently (e.g., length of time, topic of survey, sponsor, etc.). To maximize cooperation, researchers should identify and present positively valued aspects early in the interview process. Two practical implications are sponsorship and tailoring. Sponsorship refers to identifying the organization carrying out or paying for the survey. Tailoring refers to adjusting what interviewers say in an introduction to specific respondents. In tailoring, interviewers are sensitive to a range of household types and concerns, and learn to "read" the setting and various verbal and nonverbal cues, they then shift quickly to alternative scripts and tailor the presentation to a specific respondent (Groves et al. 2004).

The CC paradigm suggests a related way to increase motivation and cooperation with conversational format interviews—the interviewer first conducts ethnographic field research into the lived experiences of respondents before and during the interview (Dunbar et al. 2002). As interviewers grasp the respondent's subjective experiences and lifeworld, they relate to and motivate respondents in highly empathetic ways that are outside the constraints of a standardized interview.

2. *Body of Interview* Once an interviewer has made initial contact and secured cooperation, the next task is to motivate, direct, and guide respondents through the process, trying to prevent break-offs and reduce satisficing. Survey break-offs, i.e. when a respondent begins the survey but stops prior to completion, is an extreme form of item nonresponse, or when a respondent fails to answer specific items. As Peytchev (2009) suggested, break-off is related to demands and frustration with the survey process. Satisficing (Krosnick 1999) focuses on the respondent's cognitive tasks of answering survey questions. Respondents who initially agree to an interview may become fatigued or lose interest as task difficulty increases. They reduce effort and seek less burdensome, "easy" answers (e.g., middle response, nonresponse, or a pattern of acquiesce). Holbrook et al. (2003) suggest that satisficing is less a problem in face-to-face than other interviewing (e.g., telephone) because of personal motivation. Instead of satisficing, Moore (2008) found an "extreme response style" in which respondents tended to pick the extreme answer choices on a Likert scale.

In the standardized format interview, the interviewer uses exact questionnaire wording (without rephrasing) and asks questions in order (without returning to or skipping questions). He or she moves at a comfortable pace and provides limited nondirective, neutral feedback to maintain interest. In addition to asking questions, the interviewer accurately records answers. This is easy for closed-ended questions, for which interviewers just mark the correct box. For open-ended questions, the interviewer listens carefully, and then records in legible writing what the respondent said verbatim without correcting grammar or slang.

Probes, (an interviewer's request for a respondent to clarify an ambiguous answer, an incomplete answer, or an irrelevant response) can be controversial in standardized format interviews. Probes are a deviation from a standard script and vary by respondent. They are only used because some respondents interpret questions differently than intended by the survey

designer, fail to answer completely, or do not adhere to role expectations. A probe requires that the interviewer understand the intent of a survey question, recognize inappropriate or incomplete responses, and apply specific follow-up actions in an attempt to elicit an appropriate or complete response (see further discussion of probes in section c below). Fixed-answer questionnaires that rely on the naïve assumption model imply simple, mechanical responses; however, this makes it difficult for interviewers to detect respondent misunderstanding because answers may fit into preset categories.

It is possible to reduce unanticipated or unusable responses and to detect misunderstanding by supplementing closed-ended questions with some open-ended ones and the use of periodic probes. Yet, the open-ended questions and probes require additional time and well-trained interviewers, and they may produce nonstandard, difficult-to-quantify responses.

3. *Exiting* In the last stage, the interviewer thanks the respondent and leaves, and then goes to a quiet, private place to edit the questionnaire, and record other details. Interviewers may write a thumbnail sketch of the respondent and interview situation. This includes the respondent's attitude (e.g., serious, angry, or laughing) and unusual circumstances (e.g., "Telephone rang at question 27 and respondent talked for four minutes before the interview started again" "Teenage son entered room, sat at opposite end, turned on television with the volume loud, and watched a baseball game"). An interviewer also records personal feelings and suspicions (e.g., "I felt angry about the answer given to question 5," "Respondent became nervous and fidgeted when questioned about his marriage").

C. *Guidance and Flow Control Issues.*

In the standardized format interview, probes are short neutral requests to clarify an ambiguous answer and obtain a complete, relevant response. There are many types of probes. A three- to five-second pause is often effective. Nonverbal communication (e.g., tilt of head, raised eyebrows, or eye contact) may also work well. The interviewer can repeat the question or repeat the reply and then pause, or ask a neutral

question, such as, “Any other reasons?” “Can you tell me more about that?” “What do you mean?” “Could you explain more for me?” Different survey topics or question complexity may require varying amounts of interviewer intervention or aid. Complex, cognitively challenging questions may require greater assistance. As Zouwen et al. (2010) found, greater complexity requires interviewer intervention, which produces greater variation across interviewers.

Conversational or flexible format interviews encourage extensive tailored probing and active assistance to minimize respondent misunderstanding. After asking survey questions as written, the interviewer inquires into respondent understanding and offers explanations, rewordings, or long probes. A conversation ensues with the goal of clarification and reaching a shared understanding.

There is a critical tension between the uses of a standardized versus a conversational-flexible format interview. In the standardized format, researchers seek consistency across interviews in order to maximize measurement reliability. They assume that by having interviewers strictly follow a script and read survey questions identically they also maximize measurement reliability. However, formal behavioral consistency by an interviewer is not the same as substantive, interpretative consistency across respondents. As Conrad and Schober (2000) observed, respondent “comprehension can be made more consistent—and responses more comparable—when certain interviewer behaviors (discussions about the meaning of questions) are *less* consistent.”

Paradoxically, non-standardized flexible-conversational interviewing may increase reliability over the standardized interview format by improving substantive, interpretative consistency (i.e., how respondents interpret the meaning of questions). This is because interpretative meaning across respondents may be more consistent when each respondent does not hear the exact same survey question. Schober and Conrad (1997) argued that a standardized format interview may work for simple questions in which a researcher’s intentions map close to

respondents’ understandings. For more complex questions or cognitive tasks where such mapping is unlikely, the conversational format interview is probably most effective (also see Zouwen et al. 2010).

An assumption of the standardized format is that a private interaction occurs between two individuals, the respondent and the interviewer, but this is not always the case. The literature on the presence of others, “third” parties (usually spouses or children), during interviews has been mixed, but generally shows little effect. Pollner and Adams (1997) found little effect of spousal presence, while Zipp and Toth (2002) found that spousal presence had an influence on some responses, producing greater interspouse agreement. Pollner and Adams (1997, p. 624) said, “the findings offer comfort to researchers who ask questions about marital relations as a spouse looks on, they are unsettling from the view point of much social psychology, which underscores the sensitivity of actors to their interpersonal contexts.”

14.5 Issues in the Face-to-Face Survey Interview

A. Interviewer Characteristics

Many studies examined the influence of specific interviewer characteristics. Data suggest that an interviewer’s socially salient visible characteristics, including race and gender, might influence respondent answers for questions about issues related to race or gender. For example, African American and Hispanic American respondents express different policy positions on race-or ethnic-related issues depending on the apparent race or ethnicity of the interviewer (see Neuman 2011, pp. 347–349). It appears that interviewers of the same racial-ethnic group as a respondent get more honest answers than do interviewers from a different background (but see Dunbar et al. 2002). Yet, as Weisberg (2005, p. 61) noted, “Interviewer matching is rarely used in the United States, except when it is necessary to use interviewers who can speak another language.

“Gender may also affect interviews in terms of relevant issues, such as revealing sexual behavior, and support for gender-related collective action or gender equality. In cultures in which masculinity implies control, authority, and rationality along with minimal verbal responses and concealed emotions, flexible interviewing can be difficult. “An interview situation is both an opportunity for signifying masculinity and a peculiar type of encounter in which masculinity is threatened” (Schwalbe and Wolkomir 2002, p. 205).

Interviewer characteristics can influence answers in ways other than affecting candor and honesty. For example, an interviewer with visible disabilities caused respondents to lower their self-reported level of “happiness,” compared to when they answered a self-administered questionnaire. Apparently, they did not want to sound too well off compared to the interviewer (Sudman et al. 1996, pp. 74–76). Flores-Macias and Lawson (2008) found asymmetric interviewer gender effects—affecting men more than women on gender sensitive items and dependent on geographic location (urban cosmopolitan versus other). They also suggest that interviewer characteristics vary by national culture.

Interviewer features such as age, physical appearance (attractive or not, neatness), and clothing style may influence respondents. The male with a shaved head and beard might garner different reactions than the same male clean shaven with a modest, neat haircut. A 22-year-old interviewing an 80-year-old might get different responses than a 60-year-old who has more shared life experiences that could create closer bonds and shared understanding. Interviewer training recommends avoiding both highly formal attire and very informal, sloppy attire, instead aiming for the middle, and being nondescript. This rests on an assumption that nondescript dress will best neutralize interviewer effects.

Interviewer characteristics may not influence respondents in a simple way, but may interact with specific respondent characteristics or question topics. In addition, influence may take the form of nonresponse instead of altering a respondent’s answer. As West and Olson (2010,

p. 1022) remarked “... interviewer related variance on some key survey items may be due to nonresponse error variance, that is, differences in respondent characteristics across interviewers, rather than measurement differences.” They found that interviewers of certain ages were more successful with respondents of certain ages.

Researchers who rely on the standardized format interview try to minimize variation across interviewers under the assumption that it will also reduce “interviewer effects.” However, “interviewer effects” may remain even when the same interviewer is interviewing all respondents due to the dynamic social interaction that occurs between an interviewer and a specific respondent (Zouwen et al. 2010). In panel surveys, in which the same respondent has been interviewed over time, an interviewer’s knowledge of past information about a respondent lessens their burden and reduces errors. Yet, such improvements in interviewer understanding and data accuracy that result when an interviewer starts with detailed information about a specific respondent contract the principles of the standardized format, i.e., treating all respondents identically (see Sala et al. 2011).

Interviewers vary in motivation, cognitive abilities, and experience. Researchers have sought highly motivated interviewers with strong cognitive abilities and experience. However, the issue of interviewer experience is complex. Olson and Peytchev (2007) found that interviewers’ behaviors and perceptions evolved as they gained experience with a survey, and this affected data quality. Over time, interviewer familiarity with and repetition of the same survey questions can create boredom. With more time in the field, the interviewer becomes careless, less attentive, and speeds up the interview pace. A second possibility is that as interviewers learn more about the survey and responses, they modify their attitudes or behaviors in subsequent interviews. Olson and Peytchev also found that interviewer experience was negatively associated with interview length and interviewer interest. With more experience, interviewers tended to speed through interviews and perceive respondents as disinterested.

Researchers want interviewers who obey instructions diligently, engage and guide respondents, and produce quality data. Rosen et al. (2011) examined whether providing interviewers with monetary incentives for completed interviews changed interviewer behavior by reducing nonresponse, but they found no effect of incentives. However, Mayer and O'Brien (2001) found that greater interviewer training could reduce nonresponse rates.

14.6 Face-to-Face Survey Improvement

Strategies to reduce survey errors and misunderstandings began with pretesting or pilot testing the survey questionnaire in the 1950s. Early researchers administered a survey to a small group (e.g., 20–25) of surrogate respondents prior to full-scale implementation. They then looked for high refusal rates, many “don’t know” answers, or hesitation and bewilderment by pretest respondents to specific survey questions. These problems indicated a need to revise specific questionnaire items. As Presser et al. (2004) noted, two shifts in pretesting occurred since the 1980s (also see Tourangeau 2003).

The first shift has been from trying to fix specific questionnaire items to improving overall data quality and reducing all forms of survey error. Error reduction and quality improvement mean capturing the respondent’s “true” answer to the question’s meaning as intended by a survey researcher, thus eliminating any miscommunication or miscomprehension. In short, the goal is a perfect match between a researcher’s intended inquiry and a respondent’s honest, candid, full response to that inquiry.

In the standardized format, the shift has meant eliminating deviations from a match believed to originate in the mediation of the interviewer, survey interview situation, or question wording. Researchers tried to write clearer survey questions, enhance respondent motivation to cooperate, improve the accuracy of respondent

comprehension, reduce “interference noise” from the interviewer or interview situation, and raise the precision of data recording. In the conversational format, the shift has meant seeking interviewers who truly understand a researcher’s intent and improving the interviewer-respondent communication-interaction.

The second shift has been to scrutinize the survey interview itself with cognitive interviewing and conversational analysis. Cognitive interviewing assumes the SRIR paradigm and a standardized format interview. It views the interview primarily as a cognitive information retrieval process. Conversational analysis (CA) assumes the CC paradigm and a conversational format interview. It views the interview as a specialized type of conversation/social interaction.

1. Cognitive Interviewing

Cognitive interviewing relies on psychological models of the cognitive tasks performed by a respondent when answering survey questions. Beatty and Willis (2007, p. 288) defined it as, “administering draft survey questions while collecting additional verbal information about the survey responses, which is used to evaluate the quality of the response or to help determine whether the question is generating the information that the author intends.” Cognitive interviewing occurs prior to full survey administration. A researcher attempts to improve the efficiency of extracting accurate information from a respondent who is completing a sequence of cognitive tasks. Tourangeau et al. (2000, p. 8) identified four steps in the process: **comprehension**—respondent attends to question and processes it by creating links to relevant concepts; **retrieval**—respondent generates a retrieval strategy, uses memory and cues to gather specific information; **judgment**—respondent assesses completeness and relevance of information, integrates information, and makes an estimate of adequacy based on partial information; and **response**—respondent makes a judgment about appropriate answer category in the survey question, then edits and delivers a verbal response

Two major forms of cognitive interviewing are think-aloud and interviewer probes (see Beatty 2004; Beatty and Willis 2007; Willis 2005). In the “think aloud” method, a surrogate respondent participates in a survey interview pretest but simultaneously narrates his/her thinking while processing the question and delivering a response. For example, a respondent is asked the open-ended question, “When did you last see a doctor?” A respondent says, “Let me see, I had my annual checkup in August. Then in October, I went to the clinic for a flu shot, but I only saw a nurse not a doctor. I had a tooth extracted by an oral surgeon in January. He was really more of a dentist than a doctor. After a question from a pharmacist, I also phoned my doctor to change my medication dosage in January, but did not go in for a visit. I got new glasses in February. My eye doctor is an ophthalmologist with an MD degree. In early March, I went to my wife’s doctor with her for a consultation on her upcoming operation. So I last saw a doctor myself in February, unless you do not count eye doctors, then the last time I saw a doctor myself was in October.” This reveals three issues: (a) the potential confusion between “doctor” and other medical professionals; (b) the meaning of “seeing” a doctor as a personal physical visit by the respondent, and (c) the respondent’s chronological reconstruction of medical-related events over several months. A researcher can use this data to redesign and reword the survey question. It also may compel the researcher to clarify his/her exact intent behind the survey question.

Interview probing has a highly skilled interviewer ask multiple probe questions about a pretest interview after a respondent has completed it. For example, an interviewer might ask, “in the question, *When did you last see a doctor?* you answered three weeks ago. How did you arrive at that answer?” Through a series of follow-up probe questions, the interviewer reconstructs the twists and turns of the respondent’s decision-making process. Each method has its advantages (see Willis 2004).

Related methods of pretesting include expert panels, focus groups, and behavior codings. Expert panels are teams of highly experienced survey researchers that review a questionnaire for potential errors. In the focus group six to twelve surrogate respondents have an open-ended group discussion on a topic mediated by an observer, and it is recorded. The discussion can reveal respondent thinking on a topic. In behavioral coding, a researcher codes a transcript, audio or videotape of an interview for specific actions or statements—such as an interviewer misreading questions, a respondent’s requests for clarification, long pauses by a respondent before answering, requests to repeat answers or questions, and so forth. Cognitive interviewing and related methods vary in results. There is some question about whether they have improved questionnaires (see Presser et al. 2004).

2. *Conversational Analysis*

Conversational Analysis (CA) views the survey interview as a contextualized social-conversational interaction and holistic process in which interviewer and respondent engage in joint meaning production. It questions assumptions of the standardized format (see Moore and Maynard 2002; Schaffer 2002) and is rooted in the different theoretical assumptions. As Houtkoop-Steenstra (2000, p. 17–18) remarked, “... the so-called inadequate interviewer and respondent behavior is primarily an artifact of incorrect theoretical assumptions about the nature of conversational interaction.” CA draws on the ethnomethodological and sociolinguistic traditions. Ethnomethodology assumes that all human interaction is a fluid, on-going accomplishment produced jointly by participants. The interviewer, respondent, and indirectly the physically absent survey researcher mutually construct meanings and understandings within the constraints of an interview conversation.

CA rejects the separation assumed in a cognitive, information-processing model. As Schober and Conrad (2002, p. 68) noted, “... by completely separating interviewer behavior, respondent behavior, and question wording, this

prevailing approach relies on a view of communication that has been discredited.” In CA, an interview is a dynamic, integrative process in which all participants draw upon common sense and tacit knowledge, as well as explicit survey questions, to produce mutual understanding. In short, features that cognitive interviewing treats as being problematic or sources of errors to eliminate, CA sees as essential for successful communication, including survey interviews.

Rather than try to eliminate “errors” as respondent and interviewer jointly attempt to process an absent researcher’s request, CA seeks to uncover the ordered processes by which people construct meanings in a particular type of social encounter. CA treats the interview as a “site” of human interaction in which people combine elements of human communication, (i.e., complements, laughter, rationality, and emotion) for a purpose (Gathman et al. 2008).

CA describes/analyzes the interaction itself, at the same time, its analysis can inform and improve both conversational and standardized format interviews (Maynard and Schaeffer 2000). “As powerful as information-processing models have been in helping us understand how survey questions are answered, they can usefully be supplemented by paying attentions to the social aspects of surveys” (Schaeffer and Presser 2003, p. 68).

In CA, a researcher conducts a detailed examination of interview transcripts or recordings. This is similar to the behavioral coding method described above. A researcher notes communication slips, adjustments, corrections, lapses, and so forth. However, rather than treat these as “errors” for elimination, in CA they are vital features of communication processes that participants have drawn on from ordinary conversations as they work to accomplish coherence and mutual understanding.

In the conversational interview format, an interviewer has an active role to assist the respondent in comprehending survey questions’ meaning as well as what the survey researcher intended. Interviewer and respondent together seek an accurate understanding of the

researcher’s intentions. Once a respondent understands and answers a question, the interviewer clarifies the answer, and then conveys it back to the researcher. Thus, interview “improvement” in CA does not push for a closer alignment between interviewer behavior and a standardized script; rather, it seeks a closer alignment between the researcher’s intended question meaning and an accurate, meaningful answer from a specific respondent.

CA researchers examine interview interactions to uncover possible impediments to the respondent’s involvement or misunderstandings of the researcher’s inquiry. For example, Schaeffer and Thomson (1992) examined “don’t know” response categories in surveys and revealed a range of respondent uncertainty—neutrality, ambivalence, and lack of clarity. Houtkoop-Steenstra (2000) explored how survey questioning deviates from the normal flow of conversations, such that a standardized format introduces communication disruptions and greater confusion by blocking normal conversational repair actions. Maynard et al. (2010) examined how respondents understood requests to participate in survey interviews as either encouraging or discouraging.

The holistic perspective of CA incorporates all meaningful behavior in the interview encounter. As Mathiowetz (1998, p. 48) observed, “... a respondent’s behavior during the course of a survey interview provides a wealth of data that extends beyond the substantive responses to the questionnaire.” Wortham et al. (2011) found that the “denotation text” of survey questions—responses and an “interactional text” of all verbal exchange and actions during an interview occasion each reveals distinct and important information about a respondent. They warned against ignoring the interactional text.

In summary, cognitive interviewing and CA both can improve face-to-face survey interviews but they rest on different models of the interview. Cognitive interviewing tries to improve how the respondent processes a sequence of cognitive-behavioral tasks and seeks smooth, accurate information retrieval. CA examines the

dynamics of the interview interaction. It can help to improve the flow of communication and enhance interviewer-respondent mutual understanding. We can apply both techniques to both standardized and conversational format interviews.

14.7 Planning and Design in Survey Management

A. Before the first interview

Planning begins with the decision to conduct a face-to-face interview instead of other modes. The decision triggers issues of respondent sampling, questionnaire design, interviewer selection and training, cost estimates, and logistics.

1. *Respondent selection* The primary selection difference between face-to-face and other modes is that face-to-face interviewing requires physically locating the respondent and transporting the interviewer to that location. In addition to identifying and screening respondents (e.g., have properly sampled person, sufficient mental competence, language facility), an agreed-upon physical location and interview time must be established. Although often in the respondent's home, another "neutral" location (e.g., an office, library, school classroom) that offers security, privacy, and comfort for both interviewer and respondent is possible. The interviewer, who carries photo identification, must verify respondent identity and secure cooperation for survey participation. This may entail describing the survey purpose and sponsor, outlining the interview process, providing assurances of confidentiality, and obtaining informed consent.

B. During the survey interview

The interview follows either a standardized or conversational format. In the standardized format, an interviewer reads each question as written and in order, remains neutral and unobtrusive, rarely uses probes, and strictly follows a preestablished protocol; respondent requests for clarification are addressed minimally and in a standardized manner. In the conversational format, an interviewer devotes significant time and

effort to establishing rapport and clarifying the purpose of the interview. Interviewer and respondent go through questions together with the interviewer ensuring that the respondent understands each question as the researcher intended; the interviewer continuously adjusts the interview based on respondent needs and rewords questions to maximize respondent understanding.

C. After the interview

Once the interview ends and the interviewer exits, the next phase is recording immediate reactions, reviewing the interview schedule, and creating a record of how the interview went. The survey planner builds in time for the interviewer to complete these tasks and interviewer training includes a protocol for immediate post interview processing and documentation. An ending protocol might include the following: record the interview ending time and call the supervisor to report interview completion; document the interview event, such as any problems (e.g., disruptions, other people entering) or unusual situation; write a short evaluation of the interview session; review the interview schedule, noting blanks, adding clarifying notes, or qualifications.

D. Quality control and management issues

Quality control begins with survey design. In addition to writing good survey questions, providing quality interview schedules, and training the interviewer, quality control includes interviewer supervision. Prior to the interview, the supervisor meets with interviewers, addresses questions and reviews procedure, and oversees the interviewer's transportation and personal safety issues. After the interview, the supervisor verifies the respondent contact, reviews the interview schedule and interviewer comments, and addresses interviewer concerns.

14.8 Conclusion

The face-to-face survey has distinct benefits not present in other modes of survey administration, but it comes with costs or risks. Its dominant feature is direct contact with another person in an interview. Two paradigms of the interview

encounter (Stimulus–response/information retrieval and Constructionist–collaborative) imply using alternative face-to-face interview formats (standardized or conversational) to achieve high measurement reliability. The two paradigms also imply different ways to examine and improve survey interviews, i.e., cognitive interviewing or conversational analysis. We can use insights from the paradigms in complementary ways. An exclusive reliance on the dominant stimulus–response/information-retrieval paradigm and strict adherence to a standardized format may achieve high levels of behavioral consistency. However, this may limit our ability to acquire rich survey data with greater substantive consistency. A conversational interview format, as supported by the constructionist–collaborative paradigm, is only possible in the face-to-face survey and may offer the greatest substantive consistency. It requires more time and higher costs than a standardized format interview, and it may yield data that mixes variation originating in a respondent's responses with variation across interview situations.

References

- Alonso, W., & Starr, P. (Eds.). (1987). *The politics of numbers*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Babbie, E. (1990). *Survey research methods* (2nd ed.). Belmont CA: Wadsworth.
- Barnes, J. A. (1979). *Who should know what? social science, practice and ethics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Beatty, P. (2004). The dynamics of cognitive interviewing. In S. Presser, J. Rothgeb, M. Couper, J. Lesser, E. Martin, J. Martin & E. Singer (Eds.), *Methods for testing and evaluating survey questionnaires* (pp. 45–66). New York: Wiley.
- Beatty, P. C., & Willis, G. B. (2007). Research synthesis: the practice of cognitive interviewing. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 71, 287–311.
- Blohm, M., Hox, J., & Koch, A. (2007). The influence of interviewers' contact behavior on the contact and cooperation rate in face-to-face household surveys. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 19, 97–111.
- Bradburn, N. M., & Sudman, S. (1988). *Polls and surveys*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Burawoy, M. (2005). For public sociology. *American Sociological Review*, 70, 4–28.
- Clawson, D., Zussman, R., Misra, J., Gerstel, N., & Stokes, R. (Eds.) (2007). *Public sociology. Fifteen eminent sociologists debate politics and the profession in the twenty-first century*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Conrad, F. G. & Schober, M. F. (2000). Clarifying question meaning in a household telephone survey. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 64, 1–28.
- Couper, M. P. (1997). Survey introductions and data quality. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 61, 317–338.
- Couper, M. P., Singer, E., & Tourangeau, R. (2003). Understanding the effects of audio-CASI on self-reports of sensitive behavior. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 67, 385–395.
- Czaja, R., & Blair, J. (2005). *Designing surveys: A guide to decisions and procedures*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge.
- Davern, M., Rockwood, T. H., Sherrod, R., & Campbell, S. (2003). Prepaid monetary incentives and data quality in face-to-face interviews. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 67, 139–147.
- Della Porta, D., & Keating, M. (Eds.). (2008). *Approaches and methods in the social sciences: A pluralist perspective*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Dillman, D. A. (2000). *Mail and internet surveys: The tailored design method* (2nd ed.). New York: Wiley.
- Dillman, D. A., & Christian, L. M. (2005). Survey mode as a source of instability in responses across surveys. *Field Methods*, 17, 30–52.
- Dunbar, C., Rodriguez, D., & Parker, L. (2002). Race, subjectivity and the interview process. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research* (pp. 279–297). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Flores-Macias, F., & Lawson, C. (2008). Effects of interviewer gender on survey responses: findings from a household survey in Mexico. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 20, 100–110.
- Foddy, W. (1993). *Constructing questions for interview and questionnaires: Theory and practice in social research*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Fowler, F. J., Jr. (2009). *Survey research methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Gathman, E. C. H., Maynard, D. W., & Schaeffer, N. C. (2008). The respondents are all above average: Compliment sequences in a survey interview. *Research on Language & Social Interaction*, 41, 271–301.
- Groves, R. M., Presser, S., & Dipko, S. (2004). The role of topic interest in survey participation decisions. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 68, 2–31.
- Groves, R. M., Singer, E., & Corning, A. (2000). Leverage-saliency theory of survey participation. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 64, 299–308.
- Gubrium, J. F., & Holstein, J. A. (2002). From the individual interview to the interview society. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research* (pp. 3–31). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Heerwegh, D. (2009). Mode differences between face-to-face and web surveys: an experimental investigation of data quality and social desirability effects. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 1, 111–121.
- Holbrook, A., Green, M. C., & Krosnick, J. A. (2003). Telephone versus face-to-face interviewing of national probability samples with long questionnaires. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 67, 79–125.
- Houtkoop-Steenstra, H. (2000). *Interaction and the standardized survey interview: The living questionnaire*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Kahn, R. L., & Cannell, C. F. (1957). *The dynamics of interviewing: Theory, technique and cases*. New York: Wiley.
- Krosnick, J. A. (1999). Survey research. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 50, 537–567.
- Krysan, M., Schuman, H., Scott, L., & Beatty, P. (1994). Response rates and response content in mail versus face-to-face surveys. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 58, 381–399.
- Lavin, D., & Maynard, D. W. (2001). Standardization vs. rapport: Respondent laughter and interviewer reaction during telephone surveys. *American Sociological Review*, 66, 453–479.
- Lynn, P. (2001). The impact of incentives on response rates to personal interview surveys: Role and perceptions of interviewers. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 13, 326–336.
- Mathiowetz, N. A. (1998). Respondent expressions of uncertainty. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 62, 47–56.
- Mayer, T. S., & O'Brien, E. (2001). *Interviewer refusal aversion training to increase survey participation*. Proceedings of the annual meeting of the American Statistical Association.
- Maynard, D. W., Freese, J., & Schaeffer, N. C. (2010). Calling for participation requests, blocking moves and radical (Inter) action in survey introductions. *American Sociological Review*, 75, 791–814.
- Maynard, D. W., & Schaeffer, N. C. (2000). Toward a sociology of social scientific knowledge: Survey research and ethnomethodology's asymmetric alternatives. *Social Studies of Science*, 30, 323–370.
- Maynard, D. W., & Schaeffer, N. C. (2002). Standardization and its discontents. In D. W. Maynard, H. Houtkoop-Steenstra, N. C. Schaeffer, & J. van der Zouwen (Eds.), *Standardization and tacit knowledge* (pp. 3–45). New York: Wiley.
- Mishler, E. G. (1986). *Research interviewing: Context and narrative*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Moore, R. J., & Maynard, D. W. (2002). Achieving understanding in the standardized interview repair sequences. In D. W. Maynard, H. Houtkoop-Steenstra, N. C. Schaeffer, & J. van der Zouwen (Eds.), *Standardization and tacit knowledge* (pp. 281–311). New York: Wiley.
- Moors, G. (2008). Exploring the effect of middle response category on response style in attitude measurement. *Quality & Quantity*, 42, 779–794.
- Neuman, W. L. (2011). *Social research methods: Quantitative and qualitative approaches* (7th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Odenahl, T., & Shaw, A. M. (2002). Interviewing elites. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research* (pp. 299–316). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Oishi, S. M. (2002). *How to conduct in-person interviews for surveys* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Olson, K., & Peytchev, A. (2007). Effect of interviewer experience on interview pace and interviewer attitudes. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 71, 273–286.
- Peytchev, A. (2009). Survey breakoff. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 73, 74–97.
- Pollner, M., & Adams, R. E. (1997). The effects of spouse presence on appraisals of emotional support and household strain. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 61, 615–626.
- Porter, T. M. (1995). *Trust in numbers*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Presser, S., Rothgeb, J., Couper, M., Lesser, J., Martin, E., Martin, J., & E. Singer. (2004). The dynamics of cognitive interviewing. In S. Presser, J. Rothgeb, M. Couper, J. Lesser, E. Martin, J. Martin & E. Singer (Eds.), *Methods for testing and evaluating survey questionnaires* (pp. 45–66). New York: Wiley.
- Reinharz, S., & Chase, S. E. (2002). Interviewing women. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research* (pp. 221–235). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rosen, J., Murphy, J., Peytchev, A., Riley, S., & Lindblad, M. (2011). The effects of differential interviewer incentives on a field data collection effort. *Field Methods*, 23, 24–36.
- Rossi, P. H., Wright, J. D., & Anderson, A. B. (Eds.). (1983). *Handbook of survey research*. New York: Academic Press.
- Sala, E., Uhrig, S. C. N., & Lynn, P. (2011). It is time computers do clever things!: The impact of dependent interviewing on interviewer burden. *Field Methods*, 23, 3–23.
- Schaeffer, N. C., & Maynard, D. W. (2002). Standardization and interaction in the survey interview. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research* (pp. 577–597). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Schaeffer, N. C., & Presser, S. (2003). The science of asking questions. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 29, 65–88.
- Schaeffer, N. C., & Thomson, E. (1992). The discovery of grounded uncertainty: Developing standardized questions about strength of fertility motivation. *Sociological Methodology*, 22, 37–82.
- Schaffer, N. C. (2002). Conversation with a purpose—or conversation? Interaction in the standardized interview. In D. W. Maynard, H. Houtkoop-Steenstra, N. C. Schaeffer, & J. van der Zouwen (Eds.), *Standardization and tacit knowledge* (pp. 95–123). New York: Wiley.

- Schegloff, E. A. (1990). Interactional troubles in face-to-face survey interviews: Comment. *Journal of American Statistical Association*, 85, 248–250.
- Schober, M. F., & Conrad, F. G. (1997). Does conversational interviewing reduce survey measurement error? *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 61, 576–602.
- Schober, M. F., & Conrad, F. G. (2002). A collaborative view of standardized survey interviews. In D. W. Maynard, H. Houtkoop-Steenstra, N. C. Schaeffer, & J. van der Zouwen (Eds.), *Standardization and tacit knowledge* (pp. 67–94). New York: Wiley.
- Schwalbe, M. L., & Wolkomir, M. (2002). Interviewing men. In J. F. Gubrium & J. A. Holstein (Eds.), *Handbook of interview research* (pp. 203–219). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sinibaldi, J., Jackle, A., Tipping, S., & Lynn, P. (2009). *Interviewer characteristics, their doorstep behavior, and survey co-operation*. American Association for Public Opinion Research annual meeting, (May 2009).
- Steinmerz, G. (Ed.). (2005). *The politics of method in the human sciences: Positivism and its epistemological others*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Suchman, L., & Jordan, B. (1990). Interactional troubles in face-to-face survey interviews. *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, 85, 232–241.
- Suchman, L., & Jordan, B. (1992). Validity and the collaborative construction of meaning in face-to-face surveys. In J. Tanur (Ed.), *Questions about questions: inquiries into the cognitive bases of surveys* (pp. 241–267). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Sudman, S., & Bradburn, N. M. (1983). *Asking questions: A practical guide to questionnaire design*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Sudman, S., Bradburn, N. M., & Schwarz, N. (1996). *Thinking about answers: The application of cognitive processes to survey research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Tourangeau, R. (2003). Cognitive aspects of survey measurement and mismeasurement. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 15, 3–7.
- Tourangeau, R. (2004). Survey research and societal change. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 55, 775–801.
- Tourangeau, R., Groves, R. M., & Redline, C. D. (2010). Sensitive topics and reluctant respondents. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 74, 413–432.
- Tourangeau, R., Rips, L. J., & Rasinski, K. (2000). *The psychology of survey response*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Tourangeau, R., & Smith, T. W. (1996). Asking sensitive questions: The impact of data collection mode, question format, and question context. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 60, 275–304.
- Tourangeau, R., & Yang, T. (2007). Sensitive questions in surveys. *Psychological Bulletin*, 133, 859–883.
- Weisberg, H. F. (2005). *The total survey error approach: A guide to the new science of survey research*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- West, B. T., & Olson, K. (2010). How much of interviewer variance is really nonresponse error variance? *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 74, 1004–1026.
- Willis, G. B. (2004). Cognitive interviewing revisited: A useful technique in theory? In S. Presser, J. Rothgeb, M. Couper, J. Lesser, E. Martin, J. Martin, & E. Singer (Eds.), *Methods for testing and evaluating survey questionnaires* (pp. 23–44). New York: Wiley.
- Willis, G. B. (2005). *Cognitive interviewing: A tool for improving questionnaire design*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Willson, S., Stussman, B., Maitland, A., & Nahin, R. L. (2009). Role of self-concept in answering survey questions on complementary and alternative medicine: Challenges to and strategies for improving data quality. *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, 15, 1319–1325.
- Wortham, S., Mortimer, K., Lee, K., Allard, E., & White, K. D. (2011). Interviews as interactional data. *Language in Society*, 40, 39–50.
- Zipp, J. F., & Toth, J. (2002). She said, he said, they said: The impact of spousal presence in survey research. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 66, 177–208.
- Zouwen, J., Smit, J., & Draisma, S. (2010). The effect of the question topic on interviewer behavior: An interaction analysis of control activities of interviewers. *Quality & Quantity*, 44, 71–85.