Researchers in an ever-increasing number of disciplinary and applied fields have been turning to ethnographic interviewing to help gather rich, detailed data directly from participants in the social worlds under study. Indeed, the substantial number of chapters in this volume devoted to different substantive and disciplinary-related areas attests to the wide variation in research contexts within which ethnographic interviewing takes place today. For example, beyond anthropology and sociology, the fields of medicine, education, psychology, communication, history, science studies and art have seen a dramatic increase in projects utilizing qualitative methods of various kinds, including ethnographic interviewing.

Ethnographic interviewing is one qualitative research technique that owes a major debt to cultural anthropology, where interviews have traditionally been conducted on-site during lengthy field studies. However, researchers from a variety of disciplines conduct on-site, participant observational studies, although typically shorter than those carried out by anthropologists. In addition, researchers regularly devise non-participant research projects that center on a set of unstructured, in-depth interviews with key informants from a particular social milieu or with people from a variety of settings and backgrounds who have had certain kinds of experiences. The question arises whether these are all examples of ethnographic interviewing. Given that there is a great deal of overlapping terminology in the areas of qualitative research and ethnography (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994; Reinharz, 1992: 18, fn. 3, 4; 46, fn. 5; Silverman, 1993: 23–9), the definition of ethnographic interviewing here will include those projects in which researchers have established respectful, ongoing relationships with their interviewees, including enough rapport for there to be a genuine exchange of views and enough time and openness in the interviews for the interviewees to explore purposefully with the researcher the meanings they place on events in their worlds.

Thus, both the time factor – duration and frequency of contact – and the quality of the emerging relationship help distinguish ethnographic interviewing from other types of interview projects by empowering interviewees to shape, according to their world-views, the questions being asked and possibly even the focus of the research study.1 Also central to traditional ethnographic research is the focus on cultural meanings (Wolcott, 1982). As Spradley notes in The Ethnographic Interview, 'The essential core of ethnography is this concern with the meaning of actions and events to the people we seek to understand' (1979: 5), and the researcher’s job in the ethnographic interview, then, is to communicate genuinely, in both subtle and direct ways that ‘I want to know what you know in the way that you know it. ... Will you become my teacher and help me understand?’ (p. 34; emphasis added).2 Life history interviewing fits comfortably within the ethnographic tradition, since it is usually conducted over time, within relationships characterized by high levels of rapport, and with particular focus on the meanings the interviewees place on their life experiences and circumstances, expressed in their own language (Becker, 1970; Spradley, 1979: 24). These key definitional characteristics allow ethnographic interviewing to be distinguished from survey interviewing, including interviews with open-ended questions, because there is no time to develop respectful, ongoing relationships.

In the 1990s interest in ethnographic interviewing has grown, partly in response to the limitations of the quantitative research methodologies that, in the last half of the twentieth century, dominated such
fields as sociology, criminology, education and medicine. Researchers in increasing numbers have turned to ethnographic interviewing out of a growing recognition of the complexity of human experience, a desire to hear from people directly how they interpret their experiences, as well as an interest, at times, in having the results of their research efforts be relevant and useful to those studied. The 'up close and personal' characteristics of ethnographic interviewing make it appealing on all these grounds. Yet, ethnographic enquiry today, as the chapters in this volume clearly indicate, is contested terrain. Debates since the 1980s about epistemology in the social sciences and humanities in general, and feminist and post-positivist concerns about ethnography in particular, have raised a number of important questions that are clearly relevant to ethnographic interviewing. In particular, the debates have highlighted issues concerning the relationship between the researchers and their 'subjects', as well as considerations about what can be known in the interview process.

This chapter will describe the most recent literature on ethnographic interviewing, emphasizing how we can do ethnographic interviewing in a way that incorporates what we have learned about the impact of the interviewer/interviewee relationship on the co-construction of knowledge. Many researchers today find themselves doing ethnographic interviewing in a middle place in their disciplines, surrounded by debates about what can be known (for example, can scientific methods access the real world?) and challenged by issues raised by poststructuralist, feminist and multicultural scholars (Eisner and Peshkin, 1990; Kvale, 1996). The debates bring to the fore incongruous positions and differing emphases about what is most important to consider in interviewing. And yet, as we will see in this chapter, among the many voices there is still agreement on these goals: when we carry out ethnographic interviewing, we should

1. Listen well and respectfully, developing an ethical engagement with the participants at all stages of the project;
2. Acquire a self-awareness of our role in the co-construction of meaning during the interview process;
3. Be cognizant of ways in which both the ongoing relationship and the broader social context affect the participants, the interview process, and the project outcomes; and
4. Recognize that dialogue is discovery and only partial knowledge will ever be attained.

Even those voicing serious concerns about ethical and epistemological issues in contemporary interviewing do not reject the method altogether (Denzin, 1997: 265–87; Ellis, 1995: 94; Scheurich, 1995: 249). There is a broad-based commitment to continue to try to do it – and do it ethically, bringing no harm, and indeed, doing it, as Laurel Richardson (1992: 108) has said, 'so that the people who teach me about their lives are honored and empowered, even if they and I see their worlds differently'.

**Changing Conceptions of Ethnographic Interviewing**

The theory and practice of ethnography have been scrutinized in the international debate during the 1980s over qualitative methods and methodology, alongside the broader debates over epistemology and the crisis of authority and representation in most humanities and social sciences (Alasuutari, 1995; Atkinson and Coffey, 1995; Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Clough, 1998; Denzin, 1997; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994b; McLaren, 1992; Stacey, 1988). The literature focusing specifically on the implications of these debates for ethnographic interviewing is considerably smaller than that devoted to the issues of writing up and representing the results of those research efforts (see Chapter 32). Still, in the past few years several major works have focused specifically on doing interviewing with an awareness of the postmodern and feminist critiques in anthropology and sociology (Briggs, 1986; Kvale, 1996; Maso and Wester, 1996; Michiru and Richards, 1996; Mishler, 1986; Reinharz, 1992; Rubin and Rubin, 1993). These researchers stress that interviewing involves a complex form of social interaction with interviewees, and that interview data are co-produced in these interactions. Furthermore, they recognize that what the interviewees in each study choose to share with the researchers reflects conditions in their relationship and the interview situation. Central to this process is how interviewees reconstruct events or aspects of social experience, as well as how interviewers make their own sense of what has been said.

Recognition of the co-construction of the interview, and its reconstruction in the interpretation phase, shifts the basic assumptions that for many years defined the interview process. These assumptions are embodied in Kvale's (1996: 3–5) two alternative metaphors of the research interviewer: one as a miner, and another as a traveler. In the miner metaphor (which contains traditional research assumptions about how to gather objective data), the interviewer goes to the vicinity of the 'buried treasure' of new information in a specific social world, seeks out good sources ('She was a walking, talking gold mine'), and carefully gathers up the data – facts waiting to be culled out and discovered by the interviewer's efforts. The miner metaphor can also be extended to the taking of the accumulated treasure home, as Kvale describes:
The precious facts and meanings are purified by transcribing them from the oral to the written mode. The knowledge nuggets remain constant through the transformations of appearances on the conveyor belt from the oral stage to the written storage. By analysis, the objective facts and the essential meanings are drawn out by various techniques and molded into their definitive form. Finally, the value of the end product, in degree of purity, is determined by correlating it with an objective, external, real world or to a realm of subjective, inner, authentic experiences. (1996: 3–4)

The ideal is to distill interviews into 24-carat gold.

In contrast, the traveler metaphor sees the interviewer as on a journey from which he or she will return with stories to tell, having engaged in conversations with those encountered along the way. Kvale (1996: 4) notes that the original Latin meaning of conversation is ‘wandering together with’. The route may be planned ahead of time, but will lead to unexpected twists and turns as interviewers follow their particular interests and adjust their paths according to what those met along the way choose to share. As is true with any traveler today, what one receives in new knowledge and experiences is influenced by how one manages to connect to the people one meets along the way and how long one stays to talk, learn and build a relationship with them. Both the traveler and those met are changed by those relationships involving meaningful dialogue (DeVault, 1990; Heyl, 1997; Narayan, 1993; Roman, 1993; Warren, 1988: 47).

As researchers approach the interviewing process, they bring with them a ‘vocabulary of method’ that shapes how they proceed (Gubrium and Holstein, 1997). This vocabulary has roots in the researcher’s own discipline and in the sub-disciplines that make up research approaches – predictions and prescriptions for conducting research in specific ways. Some of these approaches facilitate ‘mining’ and some encourage ‘traveling’. Gubrium and Holstein’s (1997: 5) premise is that the social science researchers use language that ‘organizes the empirical contours of what is under investigation’. Such organization includes whether they will ‘mine’ or ‘travel’.3

**Literature on Stages in the Interview Project**

**Developing Challenges to a Positivistic Framework**

Tracing the literature on ethnographic interviewing in sociology reveals the historical roots of current ideas in a series of developments that increasingly challenged the position of interviewer as an autonomous ‘miner’. The Chicago School of the 1920s and 1930s is generally seen as the birthplace of ethnographic interviewing in sociology. Robert Park’s experience as a journalist and his familiarity with anthropological methods played a role in his demand that his graduate students go out into the city and ‘get the seat of your pants dirty in real research’ (Bulmer, 1984: 97). Park, who had been especially affected by the teachings of William James, writes in an autobiographical essay about a particular lecture by James titled ‘On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings’.

The ‘blindness’ of which James spoke is the blindness of each of us is likely to have for the meaning of other people’s lives. At any rate, what sociologists must need to know is what goes on behind the faces of men, what it is that makes life for each of us either dull or thrilling. For ‘if you lose the joy you lose all’. But the thing that gives zest to life or makes life dull is, however, as James says, ‘a personal secret’, which has, in every single case, to be discovered. Otherwise we do not know the world in which we actually live. (Park, 1950: viii; cited in Bulmer, 1984: 93)

The Chicago School sociologists in the 1920s developed informal interviewing and observation techniques that were very different from the large-scale, standardized surveys being conducted by political scientists of the time (Bulmer, 1984: 102, 104). They emphasized the need to ‘speak the same language’ as those one wanted to understand, and Nels Anderson, Paul Cressy and Frederic Thrasher had each at some points taken on covert researcher roles in the settings they were studying. They and Ernest Burgess, especially, developed the life history method as a way of getting ‘objective data’ on interviewees’ own interpretation of their circumstances and key events. Bulmer (1984: 108) sees the lasting effects of the field research methods of the Chicago School in the use of documentary sources of all kinds, in the establishment of participant observation as a standard sociological research method, and in an openness to using diverse research methods. Although the Chicago School sociologists were comfortable using a mix of quantitative and qualitative approaches, Hammersley (1989: 89–112) notes that after the arrival of William F. Ogburn in the late 1920s, the department began a shift toward quantitative methods and a positivist paradigm, as did most sociology departments in the nation.

Although the Chicago School tradition has sustained criticism from scholars representing a wide variety of perspectives, it has had a significant impact on generations of sociologists and other scholars interested in carrying out field research projects. Indeed, Joseph Gusfield (1995: xi) notes that his cohort at the University of Chicago in the 1950s, which included Howard Becker and Erving Goffman, shared some ‘tacit perspectives’ about doing sociology, and that, ‘While diversely stated and applied, these perspectives had much in
The authors of these 1970s sociological works on fieldwork were already grounded in and aware of sociology's own 'crisis of objectivity'. Alvin Gouldner's (1970) *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* had critiqued a social science that presumed (after the natural sciences) 'that man might be known, used, and controlled like any other thing: it "thingified" man' (1970: 492). Gouldner posited instead a reflexive social science in which 'both the inquiring subject and the studied object are seen not only as mutually interrelated but also mutually constituted' (1970: 493). Reflecting the spirit of the times, the classic sociological texts on fieldwork written in the 1970s posed the critical question: could social scientific methods, no matter how carefully done, generate objective data? For example, John Johnson in his introduction to *Doing Field Research* (1975: 1–12) discusses in detail a whole series of contemporary ideas underlying the fundamental concept of social science objectivity. These challenges include:

1. the 'act political meanings' embedded in social science knowledge;
2. the documented conclusions from social psychology that 'what an individual perceives or regards as fact is highly variable' and is contingent on the social context; and
3. that language not only is the medium of reporting but influences 'what it is one observes' (Johnson, 1975: 10–12).

Finally, recognizing that both gathering data and conducting analyses are dependent on the researchers and influenced by their characteristics and personal values, Johnson notes that researchers are urged to make their personal values 'explicit' in their work. But Johnson (1975: 23) goes further, positing as equally important the impact of the researchers' 'commitment to theories and methodologies', including their membership in their discipline and community of like-minded scholars. These issues and insights in the 1970s presaged key points in the major debates of the next decades on research on the social sciences and humanities.

In the meantime, anthropology was anticipating its own 'coming crisis', epitomized by Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1979), a broad attack on writing genres developed in the West for depicting non-Western societies, and calls to 'reinvent' anthropology (Hymes, 1969), since the knowledge produced and disseminated through ethnographic monographs was linked to colonial systems of oppression. George Marcus and Michael Fischer (1986) trace the wave of critiques, and responses to them, in cultural anthropology. Challenges to classic fieldwork approaches focused especially on the
issue of a 'scientific' basis for social research and
added a whole set of new questions, such as those
catalogued by Clifford Geertz:

Questions about discreteness ... questions about continuity and change, objectivity and proof, determinism and relativism, uniqueness and generalization, description and explanation, consensus and conflict, otherness
and commensurability, and the sheer possibility of
anyone, insider or outsider, grasping so vast a thing as
an entire way of life and finding the words to describe
it. (Geertz, 1995: 42–3)

Ruth Behar (1996: 162) notes that the discipline has
weathered a range of daunting crises: 'complicity with
conquest, with colonialism, with functionalism, with
realist forms of representation, with racism, with
male domination'. Behar feels that in weathering such
storms, the discipline has become more inclusive
and knows itself better, but she worries about the
current pressures to reconnect anthropology to
'science'. Behar (1996: 162–4) traces this latter
pressure to those who claim that all the disparate
voices in modern anthropology – postmodern, mul
cultural, feminist – leave the discipline fragmented
and vulnerable in today's academy. However, I feel
that even if fragmented, cultural anthropologists
debates and reflections on their discipline have
directed the rest of us consider the issues at stake in
doing ethnographic research. And with each new
well-written ethnography, we can appreciate what
the struggles and reflections mean in action (for
example, Brown, 1991; Jackson, 1989; Latour,

**Conducting Ethnographic Interview Projects after ‘The Turn’**

The effects of the rise of the different voices Behar
mentions – those voices representing postmodern,
feminist and multicultural positions in the 1980s
and early 1990s – gradually became known as 'the
turn'. Denzin and Lincoln (1994b) trace the stages
of its historical development. This section focuses
on those writings since 'the turn' that present ethnographic interviewing as method while taking these
challenges into account, providing concrete sugges
tions to researchers on ways to conduct interview
projects in this era. Steinem Kvale's *InterViews*
(1996) centers on the idea that interviews are first
and foremost interaction, a conversation between
the researcher and the interviewee. The knowledge
that is produced out of this conversation is a product
of that interaction, the exchange and production of
'views'. His book is designed to be helpful to
researchers in a variety of disciplines, and he
presents an in-depth analysis of the stages of an
interview project, addressing ethical issues that can arise
at each stage. Kvale sets out seven stages of an
interview investigation:

1. thematizing;
2. designing;
3. interviewing;
4. transcribing;
5. analysing;
6. verifying;
7. reporting.

The 'thematizing' stage involves the researcher in
thinking through the goals and primary questions of
the study in ways that can help guide the many subse-
quent decisions that must be made (Kvale, 1996: 94–8).
It involves actively planning for the inter-
view project by identifying and obtaining (from
literature searches and even preliminary fieldwork),
a 'preknowledge' of the subject matter of interest,
clarifying the purpose of the project, and acquiring
skills in different types of interviewing and analysis
approaches and deciding which to apply.

In *The Active Interview*, Holstein and Gubrium
(1995) also take as their major premise that the
researcher and the interviewee are active creators in
all phases of the interview process. Indeed, Holstein
and Gubrium assert that a careful transcription from
an audio or video tape of the interview will allow
the researcher to observe and document how
meaning got produced during the conversation. To
introduce their approach, Holstein and Gubrium
(1995: 14) resurrect the remarkably prescient posi-
tion taken by Ihde Sola in Pool in 1957:

The social milieu in which communication takes place
[during interviews] modifies not only what a person
dares to say but even what he thinks he chooses to say.
And these variations in expressions cannot be viewed as
mere deviations from some underlying 'true' opinion,
for there is no neutral, non-social, uninfluenced situation
to provide that baseline. (Pool, 1957: 192)

Pool (1957: 193) goes on to assert that the interview
situation 'activates' opinion, such that 'every inter-
view [besides being an information-gathering occasion]
is an interpersonal drama with a developing
plot'. Holstein and Gubrium pursue the implication
of having both an active interviewer and an active
respondent constructing meaning, or creating a plot,
throughout the interview process. For example,
respondents can turn to different stocks of knowl-
edge in answering a single question. Holstein and
Gubrium (1995: 33–4) cite tell-tale phrases respond-
ants use that signal shifts in roles and frames of
reference: 'speaking as a mother now', 'thinking
like a woman', 'wearing my professional hat', 'now
that you ask', and 'if I were in her shoes'. If respon-
dents shift around and give what may appear to be
counterfactual answers, it could be uninforming to a
conventional interviewer. But the 'active interview-
er' is interested in tracing how the interviewee
develops a response, so that the shifts, with their
attendant markers – including hesitations and
expressions indicating a struggle to formulate a
coherent answer – are keys to different identities
and meanings constructed from these different positions. Which responses are valid? Holstein and Gubrium (1995: 34) posit 'alternative validities' based on recognition of the different roles and the 'narrative resources' they provide for the respondent.

Even though this approach is built on flexibility throughout the interview process, the pursuit of both subjective information about specific aspects of individuals’ lives as well as data on how meaning gets made, calls for certain research strategies. Holstein and Gubrium (1995: 77) emphasize the importance of acquiring background knowledge relevant to the research topic, as well as knowledge of the ‘material, cultural, and interpretive circumstances to which respondents might orient’. Decisions about sampling should include consideration of whose voices will get heard, as well as recognition that respondents selected because of specific positions or roles may complicate the sampling plan later when they spontaneously ‘switch voices’ and speak from different positions (1995: 25–7, 74–5). The ‘active interview’ data can be analysed not only for what was said (substantive information) and how it was said (construction of meaning), but also for showing the ways the what and how are interrelated and 'what circumstances condition the meaning-making process' (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995: 79). As exemplified here, current literature on conducting ethnographic interviewing moves beyond an interest in the interview interaction, and addresses specific techniques for systematic interpretation of the text that is produced out of that interaction (Silverman, 1993).

**Feminists on Interviewing**

**Collaborative Relationships: Language and Listening**

Feminist researchers are pursuing their studies in a wide range of substantive areas, utilizing varied methodological approaches (Fonow and Cook, 1991; Chock and Patai, 1991; Harding, 1987; Nielsen, 1990; Olsen, 1994; Reinarz, 1992; Warren, 1988). However, feminists have found ethnography and ethnographic interviewing particularly attractive because they allow for gathering data experientially, in context, and in relationships characterized by empathy and egalitarianism (Stacey, 1988: 21). Indeed, Shulamit Reinarz (1992: 18) opens her review of feminist interview research with Hilary Graham’s conclusion that ‘The use of semi-structured interviews has become the principal means by which feminists have sought to achieve the active involvement of their respondents in the construction of data about their lives.’ Feminist researchers appreciate ethnographic interviewing for the chance to hear people’s ideas, memories and interpretations in their own words, to hear differences among people and the meanings they construct, and to forge connection over time to the interviewees.

Today’s feminist scholars view ethnographic interviewing as a ‘conversation’, and as such, many of them focus on the talk going on in interviews and how it is shaped by both parties. Marianne Paget (1983) has characterized this conversation as involving both the researcher and the interviewee in a ‘search’ process whereby they locate a collaborative basis for developing the question–response sequences and the co-construction of meaning. Thus, in those cases of feminist research that involve women interviewing women, the participants can utilize a tradition of engaging in ‘woman talk’ (DeVault, 1990: 101) to facilitate this search for partnership in the interview.

Though there are wide variations in interviewing style among feminist researchers (Reinarz, 1992), a theme runs through the literature of the need for careful listening to the actual talk of the interview. Marjorie DeVault (1990) proposes specific recommendations for interviewing women, noting that language is so influenced by male categories that when women talk, the right words are not easily available that fit their experience. For example, the categories of ‘work’ and ‘leisure’ fail to describe well the host of household and family-related tasks in which many women are involved for hours of their day. DeVault urges the researcher to avoid importing too many categories from outside women’s experience, including those from social science, in order to be open to respondents’ ways of describing their lifeworlds. If the available vocabulary does not quite fit, the interviewee has to translate, to work at describing her experiences. When researchers listen carefully to the actual talk, they can hear these moments of translation, which can sensitize the analysis to these aspects of women’s lives where language is found wanting.

**Emotions During Interviewing**

Judith Stacey (1988) has raised a concern about feminist interviewing that is related to the possibility of building an equal relationship with the interviewees. Though drawn to ethnographic methods as a feminist, she found some of her experiences troubling and wondered if the close relationships in the field can mask other forms of exploitation because of the inherent inequality connected to the researcher’s freedom to exit that social world. Stacey’s view was influenced by her experience in the field: one informant confided in her secrets involving others in the community, leaving Stacey feeling ‘inauthentic’ in her dealings with those others. This ‘up close and personal’ style of interviewing can indeed produce discomfort and
ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVIEWING

Levels of Empowerment in Interviewing

Several themes in the recent literature on ethnographic interviewing focus on goals that are consonant with those of feminist researchers. Of particular interest in this literature are the concepts of empowerment and reflexivity. The next two sections address the issues involved in empowering respondents and developing reflexivity as interviewers.

Elliot Mishler (1986) presents a strong rationale for interviewers to empower respondents—a rationale he developed out of his critique of traditional interview techniques. His critique shows that far from being a 'neutral' research procedure, structured interviewing decontextualizes the respondents by separating the individuals and their responses from the context of their daily lives. The structured interview protocol interferes with the respondents' ability to develop detailed, coherent narratives and to trace with the interviewer how they have made sense of events and experiences. To obtain such responses, the interviewer needs to share power over the interview process with the interviewee (Mishler, 1986: 122–32). Mishler identifies three types of relationships between the interviewers and interviewees: informants and reporters, research collaborators, and learners/actors and advocates. Each successive set increases the empowering component in the interview relationship.

Informants and Reporters

When an interviewer acts as a reporter, his or her goal is to report on 'members' understandings', but this approach is far from the minor metaphor discussed earlier. At this first level of empowerment, the researcher's awareness of how the interview itself shapes the outcome shifts the research toward the 'traveler' metaphor. The reporter empowers the respondent (now elevated to an 'informant') by listening carefully and respectfully, allowing the informants to 'name' the world in their own terms, rather than reacting to terminology or categories introduced by the researcher. Another empowering shift from traditional practice can occur at this level by reporting the informants' real names in the text, if that is what they would like, having considered potential future repercussions for them or for others who could be identified by association with the unnamed informants (Mishler, 1986: 123–5; see Myerhoff, 1994: 36 on the desire of the elderly Jews in her study to have their real names used in the book so that there would be some permanent documentation of their life stories).

Other researchers have pointed out that the admonition to listen carefully and respectfully applies not only to what the researcher does during the interview but also to the 'listening' that is done later when the researcher reviews and analyses tapes and transcripts. DeVault (1990), Holstein and Gubrium (1995), Opie (1992) and Poland and Pederson (1998) urge making close transcription of taped interviews, and then, through careful reviewing of transcripts (and re-playing of the tapes), listening for respondents' hesitations, contradictions, topics about which little is said, and shifts in verbal positioning (taking different points of view), all of which help to highlight the complexities in what the respondents are saying. This 'listening' after the interview also helps heighten the researcher's awareness of the way the interview text was co-produced. By focusing on the immediate context of the interview,
including just how the interviewer asked a question or responded to the informant’s last utterance, the interviewer can better understand why the informant answered in a particular way. In what can be viewed as a linguistic approach to interview analysis, these researchers are urging more explicit study and appreciation of the ways in which actual talk in the interview proceeds.4

Paying attention to what talk does not proceed can also be part of respectful listening. Poland and Pederson (1998: 295, 300) note that traditionally ethnographic interviewers are taught to ‘keep informants talking’ (Spradley, 1979: 80); however, silences may be indicators of complex reactions to the questions and self-censorship. Researchers need to respect respondents’ right to remain silent and to appreciate that, for some respondents, the research interview may not be an appropriate place to ‘tell all’.

Poland and Pederson (1998: 307) also urge researchers to attend to a broader context than that of the interview itself; they refer to the ‘many silences of (mis)understanding embedded in qualitative research that is not grounded in an appreciating of the “objective” material/cultural conditions in which social and personal meanings are shaped and reproduced ...’. They reference Bourdieu’s (1996: 22–3) call for qualitative researchers to have not just ‘a well intentioned state of mind’ but extensive knowledge of the social conditions within which people live. These recommendations for interviewers to be cognizant of both interaction and context of the interview — for interpreting talk, silences, and even underlying social and cultural structures — acknowledge that researchers have considerable control over the ‘reporting’ and the outcome, while still striving to empower the respondents through respectful listening.

Research Collaborators

Mishler’s (1986) second level of empowering shifts the interviewer/interviewee relationship to one of research collaborators. This shift can be managed in a number of ways. Mishler notes, for example, that Laslett and Rapoport (1975: 974) urge researchers to tell respondents how the data will be used. In collaborative research the interviewee is included in discussions up front about what information is being sought and what approaches to the topics might be most fruitful to the endeavor for both participants. Similarly, Smaling (1996) feels that the shift to research collaborators is dependent on developing trust and the basis for genuine dialogue. With the shift to collaboration, the interviewer acknowledges that the interviewee influences the content and order of questions and topics covered. The interviewee participates in interpreting and re-interpreting questions and responses, clarifying what their responses meant, and even re-framing the research questions (Lather, 1986; Smaling, 1996). The collaboration can result in rich narrative data, since the interviewer has multiple opportunities to expand at length on topics and angles of relevance to him or her.

At the same time, however, researchers can sometimes find themselves wondering how the expanded responses all relate to the research project. Indeed Mazeland and ten Have (1996: 108–13) have concluded that there are always ‘essential tensions’ in the research interview, due to three separate orientations at work throughout the interview; interviewees are attending first to their lifeworld, secondly to the interview situation itself, and thirdly to the research question. Using conversation analysis to examine transcripts of (semi-) open interviews, Mazeland and ten Have found that interviewers and interviewees engage in negotiations over the relative precedence of the lifeworld orientation versus the research orientation:

Interviewers in open interviews seem to take an ambivalent stance in these negotiations, on the one hand calling for a free and natural telling, while on the other often displaying a preference for a summarized answer, that can be easily processed in terms of the research project. (1996: 88)

Mazeland and ten Have found that interviewees in fact lobby for ways to present their story; they actively engaged the interviewers in the ‘essential tension’ over the question: ‘Is this about me, or about your research?’ If pursuing consciously collaborative interviewing, interviewers can be aware of these essential tensions and promote negotiations that are respectful of interviewees’ desire to control the telling of their stories.

Another dimension of collaboration in interviewing is including the participants in the interpretation process. This may begin with follow-up questions or interviews wherein the researcher presents his or her initial interpretations and asks for clarification. This approach may extend to sharing with the interviewee copies of interview transcripts or drafts of research papers and reports. Interestingly, this aspect of collaboration builds on the long-standing procedure known as ‘member validation’ (Bloor, 1988; Emerson, 1981; Emerson and Pollner, 1988; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983: 195–8; Heyl, 1979: 1–9, 181–9; Schatzman and Strauss, 1973; Schmitt, 1990). In checking for misinterpretations that could stem from different communication norms, Charles Briggs (1986: 101) has consulted his interviewees but found that it was also helpful to talk with others in the community about his data and interpretations because ‘interviewees themselves are less likely to point out the ways in which the researcher has violated the norms of the speech situation or misconstrued the meaning of an utterance than are persons who did not participate in the initial interview’. Certainly, the researcher would
involve the initial interviewees in any decision to share their interview transcripts with others and consider carefully any ethical and social ramifications of such sharing.

Moshe Shokeid (1997) details his experience in 'member validation' and collaboration while studying a gay synagogue in New York City. He had asked one member of the synagogue (no longer actively involved) to read his manuscripts and help check his interpretations. This led to numerous debates and detailed, intense negotiations up to the final moments before publication. He notes that the collaboration took on a life of its own and was more than he had bargained for at some points, but in the end it was something he was glad to have accomplished. Shokeid felt that the discussions about his interpretations with this key project participant, as well as other synagogue members, and later with a feminist editor at his publishing house, improved the final book manuscript. His experience did, however, raise questions about the researcher's authority to determine the final product (Nussbaum, 1998; see also Chapter 32 in this volume). Researchers who use the collaborative model will be called upon to give up some control and to respect those whom they have involved in their research projects.

**Learner/Actors and Advocates**

Eliot Mishler (1986: 129) proposes a third level of empowerment that shifts the relationship between the interviewee and interviewer still further to that of 'learners/actors and advocates'. At this level, the researcher as advocate promotes the interests of those connected to their projects (Erikson, 1976; Mies, 1983). This shift allows the interviewees numerous opportunities to benefit directly from their involvement in the research through learning more about their circumstances, including possible alternatives to their situation, and then acting on this new awareness. 'Participatory action research', as well as emancipatory research in feminist and critical ethnography are several forms of research where the researcher's efforts are focused on empowering individuals involved in their projects (Carspecken, 1996; Kincheloe and McLaren, 1994; Lather, 1991; Reason, 1994; Riman, 1993; Thomas, 1993; Whyte et al., 1989).

**Reflexivity in Ethnographic Interviewing**

We turn now to the on-going debate in the recent literature on ethnography about what it means to practice 'reflexivity' as a researcher in order to understand and allow for the interconnections and mutual influence between the researcher and those being 'researched'. In earlier sections of this chapter we encountered recommendations for researchers to develop sophisticated levels of awareness as part of the interview process. Two such examples are Michelle Fine's (1994) call for interviewers to 'work the hyphen' (develop awareness of the complex interplay of 'self' and 'other' during interviews) and Bourdieu’s (1996) call for researchers to use knowledge of the material context of the respondents to understand their stories, and help empower them to transform their circumstances. Today's discussion of reflexivity finds an interesting echo in Alvin Gouldner's 1970 urgings for a new 'praxis' of sociology—a genuine change in how we carry out research and how we view ourselves. This shift to a 'reflexive sociology' has a radical component because sociologists would be consciously seeking to transform themselves and the world outside themselves. In terms that anticipate Woolgar's (1988a: 21–2) definition of 'radical constitutive reflexivity', Gouldner proclaims,

> We would increasingly recognize the depth of our kinship with those whom we study. They would no longer be viewable as alien others or as mere objects for our superior technique and insight; they would, instead be seen as brother sociologists, each attempting with his varying degree of skill, energy, and talent to understand social reality. (Gouldner, 1970: 490)

Current discussion of reflexivity since the 'interpretative turn' in the social sciences covers a variety of topics. For example, as a research strategy in fieldwork and interviewing endeavors, reflexive practice is proposed as a way to bridge differences between researcher and respondents (Wasserfall, 1997), to help researchers to avoid making unexamined assumptions (Karp and Kendall, 1982), to promote the reconstruction of theories (Burawoy, 1998) and to create a protected space within which the respondents can tell their life stories as well as increase the interviewers' understanding of those stories (Bourdieu, 1996). More broadly, the debates about reflexivity have centered primarily on issues of representation, authority and voice (Hertz, 1997; Woolgar, 1988b). Thus, these varied goals emphasize that reflexivity applies not only to the phases of active interaction during interviewing, but also to the phases of interpretation, writing and publication.

Rachel Wasserfall (1997) describes a 'weak' and a 'strong' reading of reflexivity in the literature. The 'weak' reading focuses on the researcher's 'continued self-awareness about the ongoing relationship between a researcher and informants' (1997: 151). In this view, the researcher makes a steady effort to be cognizant of her own influences on the construction of knowledge by continuously 'checking on the accomplishment of understanding' (p. 151). This reading is similar to the form of reflexivity Woolgar (1988a: 22) calls 'bogey introspection'. Those taking this approach have urged investigators to be sensitive to the ways in which their
personal characteristics and biographies affect the interaction and production of knowledge during the research project (Reinharz, 1983; Shostak, 1981). The ‘strong’ reading assumes researchers can proceed in ways that will go beyond recognition of difference and influence in order to deconstruct their own authority (in favor of more egalitarian relationships between researcher and informants) and actively try to bridge class or power differentials. Wasserfall is skeptical that researchers can enact the ‘strong’ reading when the differences between the researcher and respondents involve strongly held, opposing value commitments. However, she feels that when differences are not great, both the weak and strong approaches to reflexivity can help minimize exploitation of informants and allow the researcher to ‘take responsibilities for the influences her study has on her informant’s life’ (1997: 162).

Karp and Kendall (1982: 250) emphasize what reflexivity requires of the ethnographic researcher – the challenge of ‘turning the anthropological lens back upon the self’. The process of widening the research lens to include the researcher and her place in the research not only enlarges ‘the fieldworker’s conceptual field, but reorganizes it. It poses challenges to the fieldworker’s most fundamental beliefs about truth and objectivity’ (1982: 250). Karp and Kendall (1982: 260–2) note that one frequently only becomes truly reflexive following a moment of ‘shock’ – when either the interviewer or interviewee respond in ways unexpected by the other – because only at that moment are assumptions on either side uncovered.

Similarly, Michael Burawoy (1998: 18) finds that moments of ‘shock’ between what the researcher expects, based on previous work, and what he or she suddenly encounters during observing or interviewing, are important in forcing revisions in their on-going theorizing. Indeed, for Burawoy, theorizing is at the heart of the ‘reflexive model of science’, which he proposes can co-exist with the positivist model of science. Both models of science may be useful, each with its own strengths and weaknesses, and the choice between them may depend primarily on how we choose to orient to the world: ‘to stand aside or to intervene, to seek detachment or to enter into dialogue’ (1998: 30). Burawoy’s four principles of reflexive science include recognition that we

1. intervene in the lives of those we study;
2. analyse social interaction;
3. identify those local processes that are in mutual determination with external social forces; and
4. reconstruct theories based on what we have learned in dialogue with those involved in our research projects.

Burawoy proposes a reflexive interview method that follows these principles: the interaction during a reflexive interview is interventionist, dialogic, designed to uncover processes in situationally specific circumstances, as well as in broader social contexts, and results in a reconstruction of a theory that fits what has emerged from the dialogue. The resulting theory is also part of dialogue with ideas in the researcher’s profession. The published theories (or oral versions of them) will return to the lives of ordinary citizens, including the original study participants, who may adopt them, refute them, or extend them in unexpected ways, and send them, via the next visit by a researcher, back into ‘science’. Burawoy (1998: 16, fn. 11) notes that ‘Anthony Giddens (1992) has made much of this interchange between academic and lay theory, arguing that sociology appears not to advance because its discoveries become conventional wisdom’. Burawoy’s (1998) reflexivity during interviewing and in his ‘extended case method’ feed into the reflexivity of social theorizing.

Pierre Bourdieu (1996: 18) advocates a ‘reflex reflexivity’, which is ‘based on a sociological “feel” or “eye”, [that] enables one to perceive and monitor on the spot, as the interview is actually being carried out, the effects of the social structure within which it is taking place’. The structure of the interview relationship is asymmetric in two ways: first, the investigator starts the game and sets the rules, and secondly, the interviewer likely enters the game with more social capital, including more linguistic capital, than the respondents. Bourdieu combats this asymmetry through ‘active and methodical listening’. Active listening consists of ‘total attention’, which he notes is difficult for interviewers to maintain since we have so much practice in everyday life of categorizing people’s stories and turning inattentive. Methodical listening is based on the researcher’s ‘knowledge of the objective conditions common to the entire relevant social category’ for each respondent (1996: 19). Such listening requires an interviewer to have ‘extensive knowledge of her subject, acquired sometimes in the course of a whole life of research or of earlier interviews with the same respondent or with informants’ (1996: 23). Important here as well is the process that promotes collaboration with the respondents, such that they can ‘own’ the questioning process themselves. In his latest research Bourdieu (1996: 20) encouraged members of his interview team to select their respondents from among people personally known to them, noting that ‘Social proximity and familiarity in effect provide two of the social conditions of “non-violent” communication’. However, he notes that such a strategy can limit research possibilities if only people in like-positions can interview one another. Bourdieu concludes – similarly to Anselm Strauss (1969: 156–9) three decades earlier – that it is more difficult, but still possible, to conduct reflexive interviews with respondents different from oneself.
The sociologist may be able to impart to those interviewees who are furthest removed from her socially a feeling that they may legitimately be themselves, if she knows how to show them, both by her tone and, most especially, the content of her questions, that, without pretending to cancel the social distance which separates her from them ... she is capable of mentally placing herself in their place. (Bourdieu, 1996: 22, emphasis in original)

Clearly, the concept of reflexivity during the research process is a multifaceted one, and it is being called on today to do yeoman’s duty. But the goals are worthy ones. Our success will be partial, yet our efforts can contribute to identifying processes and power relations at work (both inside the interview situation and outside in the lifeworlds of those with whom we talk), hearing stories respondents feel empowered to tell, and forging connections to one another across different life circumstances. These relational outcomes of ethnographic interviewing resemble Denzin’s (1997: 271–87) goals for future ethnographers. Although Denzin (1997: 265–84) is skeptical of the power of reflexivity to transform traditional ethnographic practice, he underscores the primacy of collaborative and empowering relationships when he urges researchers to adopt a ‘care-based ethical system’ (Ryan, 1995: 148) and follow feminist, communitarian values in their research. Unlike the ‘scientist-subject’ model, the care-based ethical model asks the researcher ‘to step into the shoes of the persons being studied’ (Denzin, 1997: 272–3). This issue of whether we can put ourselves in another’s place, as Bourdieu also proposes, is addressed eloquently by Elliot Liebow (1993) in his study of homeless women:

This perspective – indeed, participant observation itself – raises the age-old problem of whether anyone can understand another or put oneself in another’s place. Many thoughtful people believe that a sane person cannot know what it is to be crazy, that a white man cannot understand a black man, a Jew cannot see through the eyes of a Christian, a man through the eyes of a woman, and so forth in both directions. In an important sense, of course, and to a degree, this is certainly true; in another sense, and to a degree, it is surely false, because the logical extension of such a view is that no one can know another, that only John Jones can know John Jones, in which case, social life would be impossible.

I do not mean that a man with a home and family can see and feel the world as homeless women see and feel it. I do mean, however, that it is reasonable and useful to try to do so. Trying to put oneself in the place of the other lies at the heart of the social contract and of social life itself. (1993: xiv–xv)

**CONCLUSION**

This chapter focuses on a set of interrelated themes in the recent literature on ethnographic interviewing. It highlights the ways in which the interview situation itself constitutes a site of meaning construction that emerges out of the immediate interaction, but also out of the on-going relationship between interviewer and interviewee. Indeed, the concern with the relationship emphasizes one of the defining characteristics of ethnographic interviewing over other types of interviewing – the significant time invested in developing, through repeated contacts and multiple interviews over time, a genuine relationship involving mutual respect among the participants and mutual interest in the project out of which meaning evolves. Although this definition reflects my personal bias (and other researchers from a variety of disciplines may bring their favorite practices and theoretical predilections to ethnographic interviewing), the literature cited in this chapter emphasizes the need for awareness of ways in which the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee affects how the research topics and questions are approached, negotiated, and responded to – indeed, how the co-construction of meaning takes place. This literature review identifies increasing interest in linguistic analysis of interview talk, feminist and empowering methods of research, and development of reflexivity as a goal. Though not uncontested, these approaches provide some encouraging notes and resources to those researchers from a variety of disciplines interested in conducting ethnographic interview research ‘after the turn’.

**NOTES**

1 From this position, interviewing projects based on one-shot interviews would also not constitute ethnographic interviewing.

2 Certainly this stance, with the researcher as novice and the interviewee as teacher, contrasts sharply with other kinds of interviews, such as depositions and interrogatory interviews, during which interviewers maintain both their positions of greater authority and their continued control over the interview process. Interestingly, interviews done as part of mental health counseling could meet some of the characteristics of ethnographic interviewing, with relationships of long duration, built on trust and mutual respect, and in-depth discussions of the meanings and interpretations of the client’s life experiences, however, with therapeutic, rather than research, goals as central to the process (Kvale, 1996: 74–9).

3 While critically analysing four approaches to qualitative research, Guthrie and Holstein (1997: 11–4) probe how the approaches differ and how the ‘method talk’ of each approach guides, limits and constrains the outcomes of the research. Interestingly, the authors also identify common threads that run through such diverse research languages as naturalism, ethnomethodology, emotionalism and postmodernism; these include having a ‘working
skepticism', a commitment to close scrutiny, a search for the 'qualities' of social life, a focus on process, an appreciation for subjectivity, and a tolerance for complexity.

4 See Denzin (1992: 46–70) for a detailed discussion of the critiques and responses to them.

5 Though in cultural anthropological, fieldwork studies remain central to work in the discipline, anthropologists have been less likely to write 'methods' texts for their novice fieldworkers (Narayan, 1993; Micròmats and Richards, 1996). In her autobiography of her earlier years, Margaret Mead (1972: 140) noted, 'I really did not know very much about fieldwork... There was, in fact, no how in our education. What we learned was what to look for.'

6 For one related area of debate, see Jacoby (1995) for an in-depth analysis of the conflicting viewpoints among post-colonial scholars.

7 Gubrium and Holstein further developed their active interviewing project in The New Language of Qualitative Method (1997). Since their approach bridges epistemological positions associated with different sub-disciplines in sociology, it is open to critique from several stances; see Contemporary Sociology's (1998) symposium of reviews by Douglas Maynard (from a conversation analytic/ethnomethodological approach), Nancy Naples (from a feminist perspective) and Robert Prus (from an interactionist perspective).

8 Briggs (1983, 1986), 1986 notes that the norms governing what and how one communicates in the informant's social world may well differ from the expectations the researcher brings to the interview, and he offers a range of strategies for identifying and analysing problems that interviewers' questions can cause for the informant.

9 There are critics of such efforts to be reflexive. Clough (1998: xxiv) argues that reflexivity in the form of being self-reflexive is doomed: 'The idea of self-reflection in the self-conscious scientist has been exhausted in the growing awareness of the violence of making the other nothing but a reflexive apparatus for the scientist' (1998: xxiv).

REFERENCES


