

CONDUCTING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH INTERVIEWS WITH RICH, THICK DESCRIPTION IN MIND



INTERVIEW

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AGENDA

- What is Rich, Thick Description?
- Why is Rich, Thick Description Important?
- Semi-Structured Interview Quality Criteria
- Interviewer Craftsmanship
- Sample Interview Excerpt: Elderly man with Alzheimer's disease



WHAT IS RICH, THICK DESCRIPTION?

1. Rich, dense, detailed, and concrete descriptions of people and places = thick descriptions (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Patton, 2015)
2. Thick description is research narrative that “presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships...[and] evokes emotionality and self-feelings...The voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard” (Denzin, 1989, p. 83).



COMPARING “THICK” AND “THIN” DESCRIPTION

THICK DESCRIPTION

“Sitting at the piano and moving into the production of a chord, the chord as a whole was prepared for as the hand moved toward the keyboard, and the terrain was seen as a field relative to the task...There was chord A and Chord B, separated from one another...A’s production entailed a tightly compressed hand, and B’s...an open and extended spread...The beginner gets from A to B disjointly” (Sudnow, 1978, as cited in Denzin, 1989, p. 85)



INTERVIEW

THIN DESCRIPTION

“I had trouble learning the piano keyboard” (Denzin, 1989, p. 85)

WHY IS RICH, THICK DESCRIPTION IMPORTANT?

1. Such description opens up the world of the interviewee for the reader to better understand the phenomenon and draw interpretations about meaning and significance (Patton, 2015)
2. The source of detail, context, emotions, voices, feelings, and actions for rich, thick description is the interview. Unless such is elicited during the interview conversation and captured in the raw dataset (interview transcript), the researcher is unable to use qualitative analysis techniques to answer the study's research questions.





The quality of the original interviews is decisive for the quality of the subsequent analysis, verification, and reporting of the interview findings (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 195).



SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUALITY CRITERIA

1. Spontaneous, rich, specific, and relevant interviewee responses
2. Short interviewer questions and long interviewee responses
3. Interviewer follow-up to clarify meanings of particular aspects of participant responses
4. Ongoing interpretation throughout interview
5. Interviewer verifying interpretations of responses throughout the interview
6. Interview being a “self-reported” story requiring little additional explanations

(Brinkman & Kvale, 2015)



GETTING SPONTANEOUS, RICH, SPECIFIC, AND RELEVANT INTERVIEWEE RESPONSES

- Ask participants to talk to you as if you were someone else
- Ask participants to tell a story
- Ask participants to reconstruct, not to remember
- Keep participants focused and ask for concrete details
- Limit your own interaction
- Explore laughter
- Follow your hunches
- Tolerate silence (Seidman, 2013)

LISTEN MORE, TALK LESS, AND ASK REAL QUESTIONS

- Avoid leading questions
- Ask open-ended questions (Seidman, 2013)

HOW TO FOLLOW UP ON WHAT THE PARTICIPANT SAYS

- Ask questions when you do not understand
- Ask to hear more about a subject
- Explore, don't probe
- Follow up, but don't interrupt



The interviewer who lets a participant know when he or she does not understand something shows the person that the interviewer is listening (Seidman, 2013, p. 84).



INTERVIEWER AS CRAFTSMAN

1. Knowledgeable
2. Structured
3. Clear
4. Gentle
5. Sensitive
6. Open
7. Capable of Steering the Conversation
8. Critical
9. Able to Remember
10. Interpretive (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015)



KNOWLEDGEABLE

“He or she has an extensive knowledge of the interview theme and can conduct an informed conversation about the topic. This interviewer knows what issues are important to pursue, without attempting to shine with his or her extensive knowledge.” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 194)

STRUCTURED

“The interviewer introduces a purpose for the interview, outlines the procedure in passing, and rounds off the interview by, for example, briefly telling what was learned in the course of the conversation and asking whether the interviewee has any questions concerning the situation.”
(Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 194)

CLEAR

“He or she poses clear, simple, easy, and short questions; speaks distinctly and understandably; and does not use academic language or professional jargon.” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 194)

GENTLE

“The interviewer allows [participants] to finish what they are saying and lets them proceed at their own rate of thinking and speaking. He or she is easygoing, tolerates pauses, and indicates that it is acceptable to put forward unconventional and provocative opinions and to treat emotional issues.” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 194)

SENSITIVE

“He or she listens actively to the content of what is said, hears the many nuances of meaning in an answer, and seeks to get the nuances of meaning described more fully. The interviewer is empathetic, listens to the emotional message in what is said, not only hearing what is said but also how it is said, and notices as well what is not said. The interviewer feels when a topic is too emotional to pursue in the interview.”
(Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 194)

OPEN

“The interviewer hears which aspects of the interview topic are important for the interviewee, listens with an evenly hovering attention, and is open to new aspects that can be introduced by the interviewee and follows up on them.” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 195)

CAPABLE OF STEERING THE CONVERSATION

“The interviewer knows what he or she wants to find out and is familiar with the purpose of the interview [and research questions], what it is important to acquire knowledge about. The interviewer controls the course of the interview and is not afraid of interrupting digressions from the interviewee.” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 195)

CRITICAL

“He or she does not take everything that is said at face value but questions critically to test the reliability and validity of what the interviewees tell. This critical checking can pertain to the observational evidence of the interviewees’ statements as well as to their logical consistency.” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 195)

ABLE TO REMEMBER

“The interviewer retains what a [participant] has said during the interview, can recall earlier statements and ask to have them elaborated on, and can relate what has been said during different parts of the interview to each other.” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 195)

INTERPRETIVE

“He or she manages throughout the interview to clarify and extend the meanings of the interviewee’s statements, providing interpretations of what is said, which may then be disconfirmed or confirmed by the interviewee.” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 195)

SAMPLE INTERVIEW EXCERPT: ELDERLY MAN WITH ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

“It’s the uncertainty of not knowing. I’m gonna wake up this morning and what’s gonna happen? I don’t know. It’s the uncertainty of it all. If they’re going to take you out and line you up in front of a wall and shoot you, that’s probably not very pleasant but at least you didn’t have to put up with **you know**, but that’s not what’s going on here. You get nibbled at and you get...I figure out ok now whose name is this? I don’t know, I don’t know and you can spend a day like that **and I do**. It’s that **kind of thing if you were hitting something physical**. If you had a bad heart you know and **I can’t even keep track of the people here**. You go around with...you’ve got heart disease you know you’re probably not gonna make it **but this...it’s so ephemeral you can’t grab it.**” (Tambini, 2007, pp. 93-94)



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