

the best he could with what he had, you can't blame him for the results. If he did less than that, you can blame him, and I think he should be blamed appropriately.

Let me say that very little has been written about techniques of oral history. I hope in the future that we can have workshops on this to bring to bear our varying experiences to help the uninitiated, perhaps to see actual transcripts and have the interviewer explain why he did certain things and didn't do others. Likewise, I think somebody very productively could prepare a thirty-minute tape with three voices on it: an interviewer, an interviewee, and a narrator, the narrator saying why the interviewer is doing this, or if the interviewer makes a mistake, the narrator perhaps pointing out what the mistake is and what he could have done that is different.

Interviewing, in conclusion, is very difficult when you think that the good interviewer must know his stuff; he must be listening to what the man is saying; he must think of more questions to ask; he must be thinking of what the question was he just asked, to make sure the man is answering it. He must know what's already been covered; know what he has yet to cover. He must anticipate where he's going to go if the man, while he's talking, indicates he's about through with the subject; and in anticipating where the conversation is going to go, he must in his mind be beginning to try to formulate the next question so it will come out well-phrased. It's a very difficult business. Anyone who does it successfully is probably so successful that he should himself be interviewed.

CHAPTER V WHAT KIND OF TRUTH DO YOU GET?

"How Do You Know If the Informant Is Telling the Truth?" by John P. Dean and William Foote Whyte

Research workers who deal with interview data frequently are asked the question: "How do you know if the informant is telling the truth?" If they are experienced research workers, they frequently push aside the question as one asked only by those unsophisticated in the ways of research. But the persistence with which it comes up suggests that we take it seriously and try to formulate it in respectable terms.

Those who ask the question seem bothered by the insight that people sometimes say things for public consumption that they would not say in private. And sometimes they behave in ways that seem to contradict or cast serious doubt on what they profess in open conversation. So the problem arises: Can you tell what a person really believes on the basis of a few questions put to him in an interview? Is this not a legitimate question?

The answer is, "No"—not as stated. It assumes that there is invariably some basic underlying attitude or opinion that a person is firmly committed to, i.e., his *real* belief. And it implies that if we can just develop shrewd enough interviewing techniques, we can make him "spill the beans" and reveal what this basic attitude really is.

To begin with, we must constantly bear in mind that the statements an informant makes to an interviewer can vary from purely *subjective* statements ("I feel terribly depressed after

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and would incorporate some budgeting plan for the future by which she might be able to purchase such a dress. But the sophisticated researcher does not expect informants to have consistent well-thought-out attitudes and values on the subjects he is inquiring about.

The difficulties in interpreting informants' reports of subjective data are seriously increased when the informant is reporting not his present feelings or attitudes but those he recollects from the past. This is because of the widespread tendency we all have to modify a recollection of past feelings in a selective way that fits them more comfortably into our current point of view.

But perhaps the major consideration that makes the evaluation of reports of subjective data difficult is the fact that they are so *highly situational*. If, for example, a Democrat is among some Republican friends whose opinions he values highly, he will hesitate to express sentiments that might antagonize or disconcert these friends. If, however, he is among his own intimate friends who think pretty much as he does, he will not hesitate to express a Democratic point of view and, if he is at a Democratic party meeting where there is considerable enthusiasm in support of party causes and he is swept up in this enthusiasm, he may express Democratic sentiments even more strongly than among his own friends. *The interview situation must be seen as just ONE of many situations in which an informant may reveal subjective data in different ways.*

The key question is this: *What factors can we expect to influence this informant's reporting of this situation under these interview circumstances?* The following factors are likely to be important:

1. Are there any *ulterior motives* which the informant has that might modify his reporting of the situation? While making a study among the foremen of a South American company, the researcher was approached one day by a foreman who expressed great interest in being interviewed. In the conversation which followed, he expressed himself with enthusiasm about every aspect of the company under discussion. When the interview closed, he said, "I hope you will give me a good recommendation to the management." His *ulterior motives* undoubtedly influenced his reporting.

2. Are there any *bars to spontaneity* which might inhibit free expression by the informant? For example, where an informant feels that the affairs of his organization or his own personal life should be put forward in a good light for public consumption, he will hesitate to bring up spontaneously the more negative aspects of the situation.

3. Does the informant have *desires to please* the interviewer so that his opinions will be well thought of? An interviewer known to be identified with better race relations might well find informants expressing opinions more favorable to minority groups than they would express among their own friends.

4. Are there any *idiosyncratic factors* that may cause the informant to express only one facet of his reactions to a subject. For example, in a follow-up interview, an informant said that she had changed her attitude toward Jews. She then recalled that just before the initial interview a dealer had sent her a wrong couch and she implied that he had tried to cheat her. She recalled that he was Jewish and that she was still mad about this incident and reacted in terms of it to the questions about Jews in the interview. A few days earlier or a few days later she would probably have expressed herself quite differently. Idiosyncratic factors such as mood, wording of the question, individual peculiarities in the connotations of specific words, and extraneous factors such as the baby crying, the telephone ringing, etc., all may influence the way an informant articulates his reactions.

Unless they are taken into account, these various factors that influence the interview situation may cause serious problems and misinterpretation of the informant's statements. To minimize the problems of interpretation, the interview situation should be carefully structured and the interview itself should be carefully handled in the light of these influences. Outside influences should be avoided by arranging an appropriate time and place for interviewing that will eliminate them as much as possible.

The influence of *ulterior motives* can sometimes be quashed by pointing out that the researcher is in no position to influence the situation in any way. *Bars to spontaneity* can usually be reduced by assurances to the informant that his remarks are confidential and will be reported to no one else. The confidence that develops in a relationship over a period of time is perhaps the

be taken as a reflection of his own personality and perception and in which respects as a reasonably accurate record of actual events.

How much help any given report of an informant will be in reconstructing "objective reality" depends on how much distortion has been introduced into the report and how much we can correct for this distortion. The major sources of distortion in first-hand reports of informants are these:

1. The respondent just did not observe the details of what happened or cannot recollect what he *did* observe, and reports instead what he supposed happened. Data below the informant's observation or memory threshold cannot of course be reported.
2. The respondent reports as accurately as he can, but because his mental set has selectively perceived the situation, the data reported give a distorted impression of what occurred.
3. The informant unconsciously modifies his report of a situation because of his emotional needs to shape the situation to fit his own perspective. Awareness of the "true" facts might be so uncomfortable that the informant wants to protect himself against this awareness.
4. The informant quite consciously modifies the facts as he perceives them in order to convey a distorted impression of what occurred.

Naturally, trained research workers are alert to detect distortion wherever it occurs. How can they do this? First of all, there is an important negative check: *implausibility*. If an account strongly strains our credulity and just does not seem at all plausible, then we are justified in suspecting distortion. For example, an informant, who lived a few miles away from the campus of a coeducational college, reported that one of the college girls had been raped in a classroom during hours of instruction by some of the men college students. She was quite vague as to the precise circumstances—for example, as to what the professor was doing at the time. (Did he, perhaps, rap the blackboard and say, "May I have your attention, please?") This account was obviously lacking in plausibility. Things just do not happen that way. The account may, however, throw light on the informant's personal world. Through other reports we learned that a college girl had indeed been raped, but the offense had

taken place at night, the girl was not on the college campus, and the men were not college students. The woman who told this story was a devout member of a fundamentalist sect that was highly suspicious of the "Godless university." In this context, the story makes sense as a distortion the informant might unconsciously introduce in order to make the story conform to her perception of the university. The test of implausibility must be used with caution, of course, because sometimes the implausible *does* happen.

A second aid in detecting distortion is any knowledge we have of the *unreliability of the informant* as an accurate reporter. In the courtroom, the story of a witness is seriously undermined by any evidence that he has been inaccurate in reporting some important point. In first interviews we will generally have little evidence for judging an informant's reliability unless he happens to be reporting on some situation about which we have prior knowledge. But in repeated interviews, after what the informant has told us has been checked or corroborated by other reports, we can form some idea of how much we can rely on his account. Thus we learn to distinguish reliable from unreliable informants, although we must always be careful not to assume that, just because an informant has proven reliable in the past, we can continue to believe his accounts without further checking.

A third aid in detecting distortion is our *knowledge of an informant's mental set* and an understanding of how it might influence his perception and interpretation of events. Thus we would be on guard for distortion in a labor union leader's report of how management welched upon a promise it made in a closed meeting.

But the major way in which we detect distortion, and correct for it, is by *comparing an informant's account with the accounts given by other informants*. And here the situation resembles the courtroom setting, since we must weigh and balance the testimony of different witnesses, evaluate the validity of eyewitness data, compare the reliability of witnesses, take circumstantial evidence into account, appraise the motives of key persons, and consider the admissibility of hearsay information. We may have little opportunity in field research for anything that resembles

direct cross-examination, but we can certainly *cross-check* the accounts given us by different informants for discrepancies and try to clear these up by asking for further clarification.

Since we generally assure informants that what they say is confidential, we are not free to tell one informant what the other has told us. Even if the informant says, "I don't care who knows it; tell anybody you want to," we find it wise to treat the interview as confidential. A researcher who goes around telling some informants what other informants have told him is likely to stir up anxiety and suspicion. Of course the researcher may be able to tell an informant what he has heard without revealing the source of his information. This may be perfectly appropriate where a story has wide currency so that an informant cannot infer the source of the information. But if an event is not widely known, the mere mention of it may reveal to one informant what another informant has said about the situation. How can the data be cross-checked in these circumstances?

III

An example from a field study of work teams at the Corning Glass Works illustrates this problem. Jack Carter, a gaffer (top man of the glass making team), described a serious argument that had arisen between Al Lucido, the gaffer and his servitor (his #2 man) on another work team. Lucido and his servitor had been known as close friends. Since the relationship of the interpersonal relations on the team to morale and productivity were central to the study, it was important (1) to check this situation for distortion and (2) to develop the details.

First, the account Carter gave of the situation did not in any way seem implausible. Second, on the credibility of the witness, our experience indicated that Jack Carter was a reliable informant. Third, we had no reason to believe that Carter's mental set toward this other work team was so emotionally involved or biased as to give him an especially jaundiced view of the situation. Furthermore, some of the events he described he had actually witnessed and others he had heard about directly from men on the particular work team. Nevertheless, to check the story and to fill in the details regarding the development of the

conflict, we wished to get an account from one of the men directly involved. So an appointment was scheduled with Lucido one day after work. Because it might be disturbing to Lucido and to the others if the research worker came right out and said, "I hear you recently had an argument with Sammy, would you tell me about it?" the researcher sought to reach this point in the interview without revealing this purpose. Lucido was encouraged to talk about the nature of his work and about the problems that arose on his job, with the focus gradually moving toward problems of cooperation within the work team. After Lucido had discussed at length the importance of maintaining harmonious relationships within the work team, the research worker said, "Yes, that certainly is important. You know I've been impressed with the harmonious relationships you have on your team. Since you and the servitor have to work closely together, I guess it's important that you and Sammy are such close friends. Still, I suppose that even the closest of friends can have disagreements. Has there ever been a time when there was any friction between you and Sammy?" Lucido remarked that indeed this had happened just recently. When the researcher expressed interest, he went on to give a detailed account of how the friction arose and how the problem between the two men had finally worked out. It was then possible to compare Lucido's account with that of Carter and to amplify the data on a number of points that Carter had not covered. The informant in this case probably never realized that the research worker had any prior knowledge of the argument he had with his servitor or that this matter was of any greater interest to the researcher than other things discussed in the interview. The main point is this: by the thoughtful use of the information revealed in the account of one informant, the researcher can guide other interviews toward data which will reveal any distortions incorporated in the initial account and usually will provide details which give a more complete understanding of what actually happened.

The problems of distortion are heavily compounded if the researcher is dealing with informants who are giving him second-hand reports. Here, the researcher has to deal, not only with the original distortion that the witness incorporated in the story he

told to the informant, but also with any subsequent distortions that the informant introduced in passing it along to the researcher. Of course, an informant who has a shrewd understanding of the situations about which he is reporting secondhand may be able to take into account any distortions or bias in the reports he receives from those who talked to him. It *may* even be that the informant's lines of communication are more direct and intimate than the research worker can establish. In this case, the picture the informant gives may have validity beyond the picture the researcher might get directly from the eyewitnesses themselves.

This kind of situation is illustrated by the case of Doc, a street corner gang leader discussed in *Street Corner Society*. Doc was an extraordinarily valuable informant. Whenever the information he gave could be checked, his account seemed highly reliable. But he had an additional strength: he was also well-informed regarding what was happening in his own group and in other groups and organizations in his district. This was due to the position he occupied in the social structure of the community. Since he was the leader of his own group, the leaders of other groups naturally came to him first to tell him what they were doing and to consult him as to what they should do. His informal leadership position within his own group made him a connecting link between that group and other groups and organization. Hence developments in the "foreign relations" of the group were known by him before they reached the followers, and usually in more direct and accurate form.

Because of the wide variation in quality of informants, the researcher is always on the lookout for informants such as Doc who can give a reasonably accurate and perceptive account of events the research is interested in. These special informants are frequently found at key positions in the communication structure, often as formal or informal leaders in the organization. They have ability to weigh and balance the evidence themselves and correct for the distortions that may be incorporated from their sources of information. But it is important that they [should] have no needs to withhold or distort the information they report to the researcher. Even so, wherever the researcher has to rest on

second hand reports he must be particularly cautious in his interpretation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we should emphasize that the interviewer is not looking for *the true attitude or sentiment*. He should recognize that informants can and do hold conflicting sentiments at one time and they hold varying sentiments according to the situations in which they find themselves. As Roethlisberger and Dickson long ago pointed out, the interview itself is a social situation, so the researcher must also consider how this situation may influence the expression of sentiments and the reporting of events.

With such considerations in mind, the researcher will not ask himself, "How do I know if the informant is telling the truth?" Instead, the researcher will ask, "What do the informant's statements reveal about his feelings and perceptions and what inferences can be made from them about the actual environment or events he has experienced?"

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Facts, Inference, and Analysis

For the purposes of most social science interviewers, Dean and Whyte have made the central points. Although they focus on *informants*, most of what they say is equally applicable—although perhaps more difficult to apply—in one-shot interviews. The chief practical difficulty in such interviews is the obvious one: the less acquaintance one has with an individual, the harder it is to determine what biases or reasons for deception, ingratitude, etc., may affect what he says.

There are two general issues on which it would be helpful if more could be meaningfully said. In the first place, a good many interviewers are simply concerned with "hard fact"; did such and such an event take place? Detectives and others engaged in

criminalistics, oral historians, sometimes journalists, and, most obvious of all, military intelligence interrogators, on many occasions are simply using interviews as substitutes for direct observation, because, for one reason or another, direct observations are hard to undertake. There is great need for a thorough rethinking of the use of the interview as a testimony and evidence of fact; such rethinking would include, but by no means be confined to, the kind of points made by Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, and Sechrest, and the issues raised in the present book. At one time, I reviewed some literature about social science interviewing to see how it might be of aid to the military interrogator concerned with hard fact; although the resulting report is not uninteresting, as I reread it and look at the items in an accompanying bibliography, I believe that there needs to be some fusion of experiences and tests of validity from a whole series of fields before highly satisfactory work of this sort can be achieved; at any rate, to try to deal with this matter here would at least double the size of the present volume.

A second issue which is suggested by Dean and Whyte is that of inference; what kind of inference can be validly drawn from what kinds of interview reports? Again, in order to deal with that problem satisfactorily, we would need to discuss much which is not otherwise germane in this book. But there are several works that are moving in the direction of answering the question, and these will repay careful study; among them I find Cicourel particularly challenging. What is needed, however, is the presentation of specific interview reports with a spelling-out of the inferences drawn from them, sentence by sentence, and a statement of the reasoning justifying the inferences. Here again we come to a crucial consideration for interviewers; it is very important to keep old interviews. By and large, when elite and specialized interviews are new, they can not be published in such detail as to make any analysis of inference and validity possible; it would be a crude betrayal of confidence. But although I could now publish some of the interviews I conducted on, for example, the trade study 15 years ago, I nowhere recorded the inferences I was making. In fact, like most elite interviewers, I think, I did not formulate the chains of inference as such, so

that any effort to handle these interviews in that way now would be a reconstruction rather than a presentation of data.

I reflect the attitude of many interviewers, I think, when I point out one additional difficulty in this proposal. When I am absorbed in interviewing, or in reconstructing a pattern on the basis of the interviews, I find myself somewhat annoyed by talk about methodology. Much interviewing and some analysis of interviews seems to me to have some of the characteristics of political speechmaking or even of writing poetry; the frame of mind is not conducive to logical analysis of presuppositions. This attitude was responsible for considerable resentment which I felt at a suggestion that I should add a methodological appendix to my work on the trade study; it seemed to me a bit like asking an imitator of Anthony Trollope to give us a formal, schematic account of the process of representation in his novels.

I am not at all certain that any complete reconciliation of the tension between the observer-discoverer who makes imaginative leaps and has fun playing with patterns, on the one hand, and the analyst on the other is possible. I suspect, however, that an awareness that the tension exists and that it is desirable to shift roles explicitly from discoverer-observer to analyst would help some interviewers to explain why they inferred what they inferred. I presume that here, as elsewhere in the progress of knowledge, art and science are not really antithetical; rather, people who have learned or developed a certain kind of art at a certain stage in their own careers find it bothersome and time-consuming to add other skills or points of view later on. I think, also, that if any one had thought it worth the effort to take particular interviews and ask me why I reached the conclusions I did, what the process of reasoning was, I would have filled in gaps. In other words, left to do it all myself, I did not like the idea of formulating what I was doing, but might have found it exciting if somebody else had *interviewed me* about my interviews. Some support for this statement is found in my reaction when Morton Grodzins actually spent three days cross-questioning me on my Massachusetts and Maryland interviews for him on federal-state relations; I found the experience interesting and rather fun.

RELEVANCE

There are a couple of points in regard to "truth" and inference in the interview which deserve comment at the present time, even though there is not, as far as I know, any worked-out analysis in terms of which they can be handled. "Error" is, as Peter K. Manning points out in one of the significant articles on the interview, not absolute but rather better described as "error in terms of the model of meaning with which I am proceeding and by which coherence is said to obtain in the situation." Granted Dean and Whyte's argument that the interviewee tells some sort of truth about himself when he tells us anything at all—that is he gives us true data about *something* if we but have the wit to interpret it—granted even the correctness of a statement by an obscure eighteenth-century Swiss proto-sociologist to the effect that "men chatter through their fingertips, even when they are silent with their tongues"—nevertheless, the particular data which is being given us may be irrelevant, so far as we can see, to our model of meaning. The first task, undoubtedly, and one which from quite different standpoints is urged on scholars by writers like Dean and Whyte, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Dewey and Bentley, and Lasswell (*Psychopathology*), is to see if by re-defining our model of meaning, our sense of what is coherent, we can use the data which we are given and get somewhere. Given the tendency towards the fallacy of misplaced concreteness, there is great value in constantly keeping in mind the possibility that the data we are in fact getting will serve to organize relevant theoretic constructs, even if it is not given to us in the terms in which we asked it. It is precisely in order to avoid this tendency that matter-of-fact, institutionally commonsensical writers like Sidney and Beatrice Webb warn us against premature closure by supposing we know all the questions and are just looking for answers; it is interesting to find forty years later the high methodology of Glaser and Strauss emphasizing very much the same approach.

Nevertheless, Manning is quite right in indicating that the data we get from a given set of interviewees may be quite useless in explaining the particular problem with which we were concerned to start with. I have never clearly had this experience

myself with a set of interviewees; but it is perfectly possible that the physicians¹ whom Manning, and before him Oswald Hall, interviewed, by taking a position of "evasiveness or implausibility, free to ignore the demands of the questioner who is stepping out of his deference role," (Manning, p. 307) were thereby failing to provide Manning or Hall with any data which could be used to organize the patterns or explain the issues with which the latter were concerned. (I should add that I have had a number of *individual* interviews which were clearly failures in precisely these terms: for example, on the price-control study, a meat-packer insisted on simply calling the OPA names, but when I asked for specifics he reacted by indignantly saying "Are you calling me a liar?") There is, I think, at present no way of being *certain* that a given set of interviews have failed, provided a fair amount has been said; for it is possible that future analysts might make sense out of a collection of statements which at the moment do not seem relevant. I have certainly had the experience over the years as I have mulled over my congressional and trade-study interviews of seeing a good deal in them which I did not initially recognize—although it took me fourteen years to become aware of some of the relevant implications.² But we can reasonably assume that some sets of interviews are failures, and have not communicated truths relevant to our concerns, even though we can not be sure of this.

A much more systematic and coherent way of determining when interviews are in fact failures might be worked out by developing a theory of explanation (taking, probably, as a starting point the work of Robert Brown) which can be applied to an interview or a set of interviews: under what circumstances do interviews as analyzed provide data and inferences which lead to some sort of explanation? Since Brown's own training and field work was in anthropology, one would wish he might carry forward efforts of this sort! Such a theory of explanation for the interview would, I suspect, have to go back to F. C. S. Schiller's sadly neglected doctrine of relevance.

In the meantime, we can suggest three kinds of circumstances where interviewees are particularly likely to give irrelevant answers:

1. When there is a more-or-less professional contempt for the interviewer—(I am distinguishing contempt here from hostility; hostility may, if it is thought the interviewer will understand, produce useful comments, but contempt is less likely to do so). “For example,” says Manning in a letter to me of March 12, 1968,

one female physician whom I interviewed told me afterwards that I ought to look at her bookshelf to see all the useful AMA publications and . . . to understand the many “positive functions” which the AMA performs. . . . I told her that I was well aware of these and was, in fact, impressed with them as well. She responded that she felt she had to point this out to me since all my questions were loaded. . . . My questions were not loaded, I think they were fair. The point is, that they identified me with a position, by virtue of my being a sociology student.

It is a reasonable hypothesis that in a good many environments with a good many physicians any sociology student who was not blatantly pro-American Medical Association would be regarded as being contemptibly anti-AMA by those physicians who cherish membership in it. Analogously, many respectable Boston suburbanites with a “Harvard accent” could not have received straightforward answers in the 1930’s to questions about politics from many Boston municipal officials, unless they had gone out of their way to make clear they did not hold the “goo-goo” (good government) views expected of them. As a class, they would have been regarded as incapable of understanding—i.e., intellectually contemptible.

2. Where there is an undue desire to ingratiate oneself with the interviewer or those who sponsor his project. Back and Gergen describe the interview as a conversation with a purpose; in this conversation, they say the interviewee may be regarded as playing two games—one involving the satisfaction of expressing his own views, etc., is the information-giving game; the other, that of “establishing rapport” with the interviewer, called by them the ingratiation game (pp. 2-3). To the extent that, for whatever reason, the latter game becomes dominant, it will become very much harder—and often impossible—to get relevant data on any subjects except those bearing on the interviewee’s

notion of appropriateness, courtesy, friendliness, and ingratiation. In unstructured interviewing, therefore, it may with some interviewees be important to avoid giving unnecessary cues as to the kind of answers desired, or to give offsetting cues, so that the interviewee who is eager to ingratiate himself is forced to feel, in a way, “I don’t know what you want.”

3. Finally, there is one other situation, which, though it may contain elements of ingratiation, goes well beyond it. Like strains of bacteria that have learned to be resistant to antibiotics, interviewees in certain social groups in the United States have learned to be interviewed. Like Kluckhohn’s Navajo informant who said “I don’t know; let’s see what the published anthropological works, hidden behind the curtain in my hogan, say,” they may no longer reply with information from experience, but with the kind of information which, previous interviewers have taught them, is desired. In view of the fact that the whole schooling system tends to teach people to give “the right answers” as seen by teachers and textbooks, it is quite natural that many interviewees in our society should be predisposed to learn the right answers in early interviews (or from classroom study of social science) and then regurgitate them for the benefit of later interviewers. Put another way, a process of adult socialization may be going on, which, incidentally, has the result that certain classes of interviewees are destroying the natural resources upon which their profession depends, much like the lumber barons of the nineteenth century who laid waste great stands of timber. When I was interviewing on Capitol Hill in 1953-54 I was the only full-time social science interviewer there, and I suspect many of my congressional and lobbying interviewees had never been interviewed by a social scientist previously. Nowadays, it must be a very rare specimen who lasts a year on Capitol Hill without being interviewed, and I have been told of at least two congressional offices where it is estimated that the congressman and his top staff spend at least a day a week being interviewed and otherwise informing social science students! I have been told, also, of seven distinct interviewing studies going on in one narrow area of a Negro section of Boston; and in Birmingham, Boston, and other cities, one of the expressed gripes of black leadership is the multiplicity of studies of which they are “victims.”

One of the needs of the profession as a whole is to find out what kinds of accommodation, contravention, or objection take place in response to this process of interview and re-interview. Of course, as I point out in "The Goodwill of Important People," the irritation which such repeated requests for interviews create provides a reason for trying to direct researchers and students away from "the hot social problems" and the fashionable research sites of the moment—of course, this contention will be strenuously rejected by some policy-oriented social scientists. In reply, I would argue we can learn more about policy by studying less-studied issues, but this leads to a number of other considerations which there is not space to discuss here.

As a practical matter, I think anyone beginning a project might well take into account the probability that (a) hot and fashionable subjects are being overstudied, (b) he has a better chance of discovering something new in a less hot or fashionable area, and (c) he has a much better chance of being welcomed and appreciated by informants and interviewees in understudied and unfashionable areas.³

NOTES

¹Hall, and Manning quoting Hall, argue that it is the higher status of the physician vis-à-vis the interviewer which is significant in creating this difficulty. Considering successful interviews with judges, congressmen, and important businessmen, I do not think status by itself is the explanatory factor.

²I believe people who read both my *How Organizations Are Represented in Washington* (1969) and the section on Congress and lobbyists in *American Business and Public Policy* (although this was published in 1963, all that I wrote of it was completed by late 1955), will see ideas in the new book which should be in the old one, based on interviews conducted for the old one.

³There are numerous understudied areas. There are, as yet, relatively few studies in the politics of air and water pollution, for instance, though this will probably change rapidly. Or as Senator Metcalf is fond of pointing out, political scientists have rarely concerned themselves with studying regulatory agencies, federal, state, or Canadian. Or how many sociologists are studying reciprocity, conversation, or resentment? Or how many studies are there of legal counseling or the taking of medical histories?

CHAPTER VI TOWARD A TRANSACTIONAL THEORY OF INTERVIEWING:

Self-Assessment in the Interview Process

Much of what would otherwise have to be said in this chapter has already been presented by Webb and Salancik in 49 indispensable pages. They show why the reporter-interviewer must develop a self-consciousness about what is affecting the interviewee—including how he himself affects the interviewee.

Of course, assessment of interviewee responses and reactions is as important for other kinds of interviewers as for journalists. Indeed, for the social scientist or for the physician who is taking a medical history, for instance, it ought to be, if anything, more important. They must remember that interviewees, usually, are not engaging in undirected monologues but are, on the contrary, addressing themselves to specific conceptions of a specific audience. And ordinarily conceptions of a specific audience are *in part* determined by the characteristics of the interviewer as perceived by the interviewee.

Webb and Salancik have brought together analytic and experimental evidence to support this finding; however, any interviewer worth his salt intuitively realizes that, for instance, few men will talk in the same way about a job to those whom they regard as not really understanding it as they will to those who strike them as being sophisticated about it. Or interviewers are aware that a question or comment made by a much younger or much older person will often evoke a different kind of response from that made by an age-mate. And so on and so forth—in all elite or specialized interviewing, interviewers will come across many examples of the way in which the interviewer, because of what he is or appears to be, affects the content, the style, the tone of responses. And, similarly, any informant who has had a relationship with the interviewer over a period of time will talk in terms