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2 How have qualitative interviews developed?

Introduction

The systematic use of interviews as a social research method in their own right (rather than part of observation, for example) to explore people's understandings of their lives and aspects of their experiences is relatively recent, from the latter part of the twentieth century. Throughout that time there has been constant interplay between epistemological or philosophical ideas about the nature of social life and our ability to know about it, and how interviews are thought about and practised. Key issues that have woven themselves throughout the history of qualitative interviews are debates about what should be or is the relationship between researchers, the researched and the research. These have manifest themselves in debates about foundations and truth; bias and standardization; reflexivity and construction; and difference and power, among others. Interviews are not, in themselves, inherently biased or unbiased, oppressive or progressive and so on; rather it is the philosophical approach underpinning them that in large part creates such debates.

As well as shifting philosophical stances shaping understandings of the practice of qualitative interviews, the development of research governance procedures and advances in technologies have also played their part in possibilities for and debates about the relationship between researchers, the researched and the research.

Histories of qualitative interviews

Qualitative research, as an acknowledged and systematic approach to knowledge creation, has its roots in the anthropology and sociology of the early decades of the twentieth century (e.g. Malinowski 1922; Mead 1935; Park and Burgess 1925). There are various versions of the history and development of interviews, but Norman Denzin and Yvonne Lincoln's

ideas have been especially influential in the qualitative field (2000, 2011). They argue that qualitative social research as a field of enquiry in its own right has operated within eight or nine historical 'moments', from 1900 onwards. We represent these in Table 2.1, which charts a complex field of overlapping phases with legacies that operate simultaneously in the present: 'Successive waves of epistemological theorizing move across these eight moments' (3), from positivist rigour, through interpretive reflexivity, to multiplicity and politicization. Thus qualitative interviewing, encompassed within these broader shifting philosophical phases, aims to achieve and means different things in each of them.

Denzin and Lincoln assert that they are not presenting a progress narrative since all the moments are circulating and competing in the present eighth/ninth moment, but it is difficult not to read their work as a celebration of the emergence of multiple modes of knowing. The moments themselves seem to follow Anthony Giddens' image of a 'runaway world' in late or high modernity (2003) as they speed up during the latter part of the twentieth century and into the first decade of the twenty-first. Perhaps dramatic and constant change appears to us to be the motif of the time period that we are living through, while the past seems to be more stable. Marja Alastalo, for example, points to the 'quite remarkable changes' (2008: 30) that occurred in qualitative methods during the 1920s. The case study method, as qualitative research was usually referred to at the time, came to be regarded as an approach in its own right, often in opposition to the statistical method (though some also saw them as complementary). The idea of 'the case study method' then faded, with the concept of qualitative research and methods emerging post-World War II.

Looking specifically at qualitative interviews and broadly echoing Denzin and Lincoln's depiction of the direction of historical movements entailed in the crisis of representation, Steiner Kvale (1996) refers to a shift in understanding the interview using metaphors of miner or traveller for the interviewer. The miner, or modernist interviewer, is seeking to uncover nuggets of truth through interviews to access a seam of knowledge that is 'out there', ready to be gathered up. The traveller, or postmodern interviewer, embarks upon an interactive and reflective interpretation of how they came to 'see' and transform particular 'sights' into knowledge. Also in line with Denzin, Kvale clearly prefers the postmodern traveller,

Table 2.1 Qualitative research: historical moments (Denzin and Lincoln 2011)

<i>Historical moments</i>	First Traditional	Second Modernist	Third Blurred Genres	Fourth Crisis of Representation	Fifth Postmodern/ Experimental	Sixth Post-Experimental	Seventh Contestation	Eighth/Ninth Now/Future
<i>Time from</i>	1900 →	1950 →	1970 →	1986 →	1990 →	1995 →	2000 →	2010 →
<i>Features</i>	Positivist, foundational paradigm Objectivity Verification	Positivist, foundational paradigm Methodological rigour and procedural formalism Appearance of challenges: post-positivist arguments	Acceptance of post-positivist arguments Emergence of variety of different interpretive perspectives (e.g. feminism, structuralism, cultural studies) and qualitative methods Humanities become central resources Researcher as bricoleur	Change in relations of fieldwork, analysis and writing up Struggle to locate researcher and subjects in texts Reflexive acknowledgement of values, power, social divisions Methodological diaspora – humanists migrate to social sciences, social scientists turn to humanities Text and content blur	Move away from foundational and quasi-foundational Triple crisis of representation, legitimation and praxis Search for evocative, moral critical and local evaluative criteria Experimental creativity using tropes and stories	Composing new ethnographies Literary and rhetorical tropes Narratives and storytelling Autobiography. Multimedia Humanistic social justice	Methodological contestation Backlash from methodological evidence-based social movement Interdisciplinarity Active political and democratic engagement	Moral discourse Sacred textualities Critical conversations about democracy race, gender, class, nation-states, globalization, freedom, community

but acknowledges the presence of the modernist miner operating in the qualitative research interview landscape at the same time.

An alternative view of shifts in the understanding and practice of qualitative interviews is offered by Mike Savage. In the context of a steady growth in qualitative research since the late 1950s/early 1960s in Britain, Savage identifies: ‘a distinctive break between what I term “gentlemanly” social science (as a means of making its masculine and bourgeois aspects explicit) which prevailed in 1950, and an emergent professional and “demoralized” social science which was ascending by the mid-1960s’ (2010: 12). He makes the case that the 1960s was a period in which the specifically sociological qualitative interview about everyday life was emergent practice in uncharted territory. While researchers had a clear sense of their own importance, there was a lack of clarity in researcher–researched relationships and how they were to treat each other. British social researchers of the early 1960s had not yet come to distinguish their visual observation from the research subjects’ elicited narratives in interviews. Observational comments on the interviewees – their appearance, attitudes and behaviour – was regarded as much a means of accessing knowledge as the interviewees’ words. This is a process that placed the interviewer as an intellectual and moral authority. In contrast, Savage asserts, contemporary research practice removes the subject as physicality (or at least the researcher’s view of it) and turns them into professional text. The means-focused concern of contemporary qualitative researchers with ethical relations between researcher and researched, the avoidance of value judgements about research subjects and prioritizing their voices, has resulted in the researcher hiding their own traces and imprint (Gillies and Edwards 2012).

Conceptions about the place of the researcher in relation to the social world generally, and the people who they interview specifically, vary according to the philosophical approach that they take in conducting their research.

Different philosophical approaches and their understanding of interviews

In what follows, we attempt briefly to introduce a range of philosophical approaches to knowledge that underpin its production, to show how they conceptualize interviews in different ways and consider the

implications of this. Our intention is not to offer comprehensive coverage of all possible philosophies that inform social research or detailed accounts of those we do address. Rather, we want to demonstrate that interviews signify different possibilities in relation to the generation of knowledge dependent on the approach. We have loosely followed the convention of shifts in approaches from foundational, through interpretive, to politicization in organizing our discussion, but this in no way implies a developmental progression from one to another. Rather, it is more by way of a *mélange* of explanations, assertions, links and challenges.

Positivism and interviews

Positivism is not a simple or single concept, and there is no completely shared understanding of the concept. Nonetheless, the main features of positivism are that it distinguishes between the external world and the observer experiencing it, uses observable evidence, and employs objectivity in separating out value-free knowledge gained through systematic procedures from beliefs, feelings and moral stances (Williams 2000). Positivisms' stress on objective reality and truth, as distinct from subjective and varied understandings, means that the production of knowledge is regarded as replicable and thus able to be tried and tested.

What is called a foundational approach is taken to the purpose and process of interviews, where knowledge is deductive, objective and value free. Access to truth and thus to knowledge is through adhering to tried and tested rules of method that are universally applicable, regardless of context. Such an approach may involve standardization, where the researcher ensures that all interviewees are asked the same questions in the same ways. More crucial, however, is the elimination or at the very least minimization of any influence from the researcher, based on concerns that qualitative interviews can lack objectivity and be subject to bias. For accurate data to be obtained in an interview, and in the analysis, researchers need to be impartial and not contaminate an interviewee's report of their activities and experiences. Overall, a positivist approach to interviews demands a mechanistic conception of questions as stimulus and answers as response.

In positivist parlance, the use of interviews is referred to as 'gathering' data because the material is regarded as a report on a reality that is independent of the interviewee. Kvale's metaphor of the interviewer as

miner captures this approach to interviewing. Further, because it reflects an independent reality, the data gathered in interviews will be verifiable – interviewees' accounts of behaviour or events being either truthful and reliable, or misleading and distorted. An interviewee's account can be checked for credibility, for example by comparing what he or she says with the researcher's own observations, or official records, or the accounts of other people who were involved in the situation or event (often referred to as triangulation).

An example of positivist claims about knowledge gained through interviewing are those put forward by William Foot Whyte, author of the groundbreaking, classic sociological study *Street Corner Society* (1993), as part of an exchange with postmodern commentators who challenge his work as foundational and positivist-social realist (postmodern approaches are discussed later). Although rejecting the labels of these challenges, in responding to postmodern ideas that there is no distinction between objective, observed knowledge and subjective, inferred phenomena Whyte is asserting key tenets of modernist beliefs rooted in a disinterested observer seeking objective truth with universal validity:

Physical and social facts can be directly observed or otherwise documented . . . If we accept that [there is no permanent truth only different versions of different stories], we are denying the possibility of building a behavioural science. (1996a: 223, 225)

A direct contrast to this assertion of a distinction between observable fact and subjective meaning and a mechanistic conception of the interview process can be found in interpretive approaches to how the social world works and how people can know about it.

Interpretive approaches and interviews

Interpretivism covers a broad range of different phenomenological philosophical approaches (constructivism, symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, etc.) that are all loosely concerned with understanding social phenomena from the perspectives of those involved. Thus in this approach, knowledge takes the form of explanations of how others interpret and make sense of their day-to-day life and interactions (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006).

As human interaction and negotiation is seen as the basis for the creation and understanding of social life in interpretive approaches, it is the interaction of the participants in the interview situation – the researcher and the researched – that creates knowledge. The data in the form of talk that comprises the interview is regarded as a co-construction – what Kvale calls a literal *inter-view*. Kvale's metaphor of the interviewer as traveller gains purchase in these approaches. It does not reach complete fulfilment in many interpretive approaches however because there is still a sense that interviewees can recount and convey to the researcher experiences and feelings that are part of their social world beyond the interview.

An example of knowledge as grasping meaning-making and the interview as co-production is provided in Bill Jordan and colleagues' book *Putting the Family First* (1994). It reports on their study of how parents in higher income households make decisions about participation in the labour market, and they identify the moral project of the book's title as the legitimation that the mothers and fathers drew on in talking about their choices and decisions. In one chapter Jordan and colleagues provide an analysis of the interview interactions that are the basis for their book. They show the interactional order of the 'set piece' of the interview and the presentation of moral and competent selves that it sustains, and how this is most evident when that order is disrupted:

The research interview is somewhat formal and staid, with an established procedure for taking turns, questions and answer, and polite listening . . . interviewees are invited to tell their stories and are guaranteed a high degree of ritual respect . . . Conversely, there are certain requirements of the research interview that impose constraints. Respondents are supposed to confine themselves to relevant answers and to reply in ways that contribute to the research inquiry (as well as to 'give face' to the interviewer as a serious social scientist) . . . [Some fathers] subverted the interview (and hence their presentation of a morally adequate self) by not giving a coherent, serious account of how what they have made of themselves constituted an instance of putting the family first. Hence the self they achieved in the interview account was heretical in terms of the requirements of individualism and partnership, and risked offending the interviewer and breaching the expectations of the research project. (Jordan et al. 1994: 56, 57)

An example Jordan and colleagues give is of the roles of interviewer (Q) and interviewee (Mr Hazel) momentarily becoming reversed during interaction:

Mr Hazel: I mean would you go and work in the middle of Sheffield or somewhere?

Q: I've actually got an application in for Sheffield.

Mr Hazel: Why are you going to Sheffield, because it's there I suppose?

Q: Because it's a job.

Mr Hazel: Because it's a job, absolutely, change your job . . . and if you're young it might be quite a nice and exciting thing, but in terms of people settled with families . . . (1994: 59)

Jordan and colleagues note that it is their male interviewees who are most likely to disrupt the interactional order of the interview. As part of highlighting the unequal gendered nature of social life, feminist approaches also understand knowledge production as deeply gendered.

Feminisms and interviews

There are a number of feminist approaches, including liberal, radical, socialist, standpoint, Black, postmodern, postcolonial and psychoanalytic, but what feminisms largely have in common is a focus on drawing attention to embedded gendered inequalities and power (Tong 2009). Feminist research has often been characterized as *qualitative research by women on women and for women*, but feminists also conduct quantitative research and research on men, and men can conduct research adopting feminist perspectives. Nonetheless, many feminist researchers are concerned with giving voice to women's own accounts of their understandings, experiences and interests, which gives them a strong link to the phenomenological approaches discussed above. In this respect there are arguments not only that a feminist approach has a special affinity with qualitative interviews, but also that feminism has made major contributions to reshaping how qualitative interviewing is understood more broadly (see Doucet and Mauthner 2008 for an excellent discussion).

The second wave of feminist activism and scholarship about the process of qualitative interviews posed a major challenge to male-dominated ideas about the possibility and desirability of a mechanistic, unbiased, scientific, value-free and objective interview. For example, in a now classic, influential

piece, Ann Oakley drew on her research on transition to motherhood to contend that detached, uncontaminated interviewing practice was impossible and morally indefensible, and indeed non-hierarchical engagement was a feature of generating knowledge and insight:

[T]he goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship . . . The dilemma of a feminist interviewer interviewing women could be summarised by considering the practical application of some of the strategies recommended in the textbooks for meeting interviewee's questions. For example, these advise that such questions as 'Which hole does the baby come out of?' 'Does an epidural ever paralyse women?' and 'Why is it dangerous to leave a small baby alone in the house?' should be met with such responses from the interviewer as 'I haven't thought enough about it to give a good answer right now', or 'a head-shaking gesture which suggests "that's a hard one"'. (1981: 41)

Oakley raised the idea of reciprocity akin to friendship as a feature of 'women interviewing women'. She suggested that there can be 'no intimacy without reciprocity' (49), where researchers give back something of themselves to their participants.

Oakley's contribution stimulated a rich vein of feminist discussions about the possibilities and impossibilities of non-hierarchical relations, empathy, reciprocity and rapport in qualitative interviewing practice, and the implications for knowledge production. Some have detailed the way that systematic social divisions and characteristics, such as class, ethnicity, age, sexuality and so on, cut across gender and create power imbalances between women researchers and their subjects, and restrict the ability to know the 'Other' through interviews. Others have explored interviews as a two-way flow of power relations between the researcher and the researched, complicating ideas about reciprocity. And still others have questioned the extent to which there is any single, core and coherent social position and identity for both researchers and research subjects within an interview, and any one, coherent knowledge to be constructed (see postmodern approaches later). (See Letherby 2003 for a review of the debates.)

Feminist concerns with giving voice to the marginalized, equality and at least attempting to work with power differentials in interviewing practice and the research process chimes with the idea of emancipatory approaches to interviewing in research with marginalized groups.

Emancipatory approaches and interviews

Key motifs of emancipatory approaches are issues of power and liberation from oppression, and a central tenet is that all people should control their own lives and society generally (e.g. Freire 2006). Traditional or conventional research is regarded as inevitably political since it represents the interests of particular, usually powerful and colonizing, groups in society. The argument is that researchers cannot be independent: they are either on the side of the oppressors or the oppressed. From an emancipatory perspective, the aim of conducting research is to enable the voices of marginalized groups to be heard on their own terms – to understand the world in order to change it and achieve social justice (e.g. Lather 1991).

An emancipatory approach is concerned with the politics of research in fields of life characterized by social discrimination and marginalization, such as minority ethnic and indigenous populations, children and older people, disabled and working-class people. The emphasis is on working collaboratively with, and placing control in the hands of, the people who are living the research topic, rather than researchers. Members of the social group whose lives and circumstances form the subject of the research are viewed as co-constructors of knowledge and validators of claims to knowledge. One way of realizing this is with 'peer' or community researchers: people who live within and have everyday experiences as a member of a particular geographical or social community or social group, and who work alongside academic or professional researchers to generate and understand information collected from their peers for research purposes, including through qualitative interviews (Edwards and Alexander 2011). Another way is through participatory research, where the whole research is controlled by the local or social group in question, rather than by researchers who occupy an advisor role (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995). In this case, it would be the lay researchers who would identify and carry out qualitative interviews as the method that they have selected to help them answer the research questions that they have identified.

Adherents of emancipatory research practice nonetheless identify several tensions and contradictions in the process. The idea of 'better'

knowledge being produced through peer and participatory research can be instrumental rather than empowering. Ideas about marginalized group membership can be essentializing and ignore power relations within the group itself. And perhaps most telling, the very activity of pursuing liberation and empowerment through research involves relations of dominance, where emancipation is conferred on disempowered groups by researchers, which runs the risk of perpetuating the status quo.

The dissolution of authoritative, absolute foundations for knowledge in place of marginalized, localized and indigenous understandings can be regarded as one of the hallmarks of liberatory research practice, and in this respect there are links to postmodern approaches.

Postmodernism and interviews

Postmodernism is a broad philosophical term, extending across social science and the arts and humanities. There are several different versions, but postmodern approaches share a turning away from the possibility of universal systems of thought, challenging the legitimacy of meta-narratives, such as modernist beliefs. Dichotomous distinctions between objectivity and subjectivity, fact and fiction, and indeed researcher and researched are regarded as having broken down. There are no straightforward facts and meanings that can form knowledge; rather knowledge and its creation are subject to critique and negotiation, and many versions of the truth exist side by side (O'Donnell 2003).

At their most radical, postmodern approaches detach representation from experience and so challenge the possibility of interviewing (or any other method) as a means of social enquiry, and indeed the endeavour of social research itself. Other postmodernists still see potential and meaning in reflexive interview practice that is aware of the relationship between the means of knowledge production and social reality. As noted in Chapter 1, the postmodern era has been characterized as 'the interview society', in which interviews are central to how people make sense of their lives – the confessional narration is how individual subjectivity is constructed, and how 'internal' experiential truth is understood:

The interview is part and parcel of our society and culture. It is not just a way of obtaining information about who and what we are; it is now an integral, constitutive feature of our everyday lives. Indeed, as the romantic impulses of interviewing imply, it is at the very heart

of what we have become and could possibly be as individuals . . . [This implies that] we must think carefully about technical matters because they produce the detailed subject as much as they gather information about him or her. (Gubrium and Holstein 2003a: 29)

Postmodern interviews disrupt the classic technical contours of the designated interviewer – interviewee roles (noted earlier by Jordan et al.); they are not about the imparting of one person's or a group's worldview as interviewees to another who, as researcher, will turn it into knowledge. Interviews cannot refer to some objective reality beyond themselves. Rather, it is the exchange itself, between an interviewee or interviewees and an interviewer, that is of significance and meaning – when, how and why those involved ask questions, construct and tell stories about particular events and experiences in particular ways and so on (see contributions to Gubrium and Holstein 2003b). It is in this approach that Kvale's idea of the researcher as traveller is fulfilled.

Critical realism and interviews

Critical realism assumes the existence of a world that is independent of people's perceptions of it (echoing positivism), but regards that world as accessible only through people's subjectivity and senses, including those of researchers (echoing interpretive approaches). Critical realists are concerned with representing the structural order of the external (material, or material and social) world that underlies the experience of it, and do not regard scientific knowledge as the only means of accessing this order (e.g. Bhaskar 1989).

In terms of qualitative research interviews from a critical realist approach, even if reality and structures are not fully available to people, researchers can still grasp them by working from interviewees' accounts of their understandings and experiences in dialogue with theories about what social reality is like and how it works. The approach also recognizes that researchers' values are inherent in all phases of the research process, and that truth is negotiated through dialogue. Thus, while the objective structuring of reality cannot be comprehended in a perfect way, it can be attempted through the use of qualitative interviewing methods to

uncover the manifest interactions of the social world, which are then subjected to the transcendental process of theory generation

to infer the structural conditioning of the interactions . . . [and] to subsequently test the veracity of theories concerning the nature and effects of the structures pertaining. (Porter 2002: 65)

Psychoanalytic approaches and interviews

Psychoanalytic approaches are concerned with emotion and unconscious processes at the heart of subjectivity. They share a commitment to challenging the idea of a rational, knowing subject. Rather, such approaches assume that there are levels of people's perception and experience that are both deeply irrational and difficult to access. Broadly, a psychoanalytic version of subjectivity holds that people resist certain memories, feelings or desires and repress them from conscious thought because they feel them to be bad or forbidden or they do not make sense. People are unconsciously defended against acknowledging and experiencing the ambivalence and anxiety that the internal conflict of feeling things that are deemed unacceptable brings about, through psychic mechanisms such as projection, splitting, transference, fantasy and so on (Elliott 2002).

The implications for conducting qualitative interviews taking a psychoanalytic approach are in the rejection of the idea that people are consciously self-aware and know why they think, say and do, and can report this directly to researchers (as with interpretive approaches). Researchers taking a psychoanalytic approach to interviews thus argue for the use of an unstructured narrative mode to allow room for unconscious processes to surface (a hidden psychic structuring that has some echoes of the critical realist structuring of reality), as well as multiple and inconsistent subjectivity (with resonances with postmodern understandings of personhood and knowledge). The seven aspects of enabling knowing through the psychoanalytic research interview that Kvale (1996) identifies, for example, include: the intensive individual case study; the open and non-directive mode of interviewing; the interpretation of meaning that allows for ambiguity and contradiction; the temporal dimension intertwining past, present and future; and human interaction involving emotions.

Valerie Walkerdine and colleagues (2002) report role disruption behaviour on the part of some of their male interviewees similar to that identified by Jordan et al. earlier, but have a different reading of its meaning from a psychoanalytic perspective: that these men were defending themselves from feelings of vulnerability stirred up by the interview (191). Interest

in unconscious processes is not centred on those of the interviewee alone, however; the subjectivity of the researcher is also implicated. The detached interviewer of positivist approaches, in this model, is a defended researcher:

What is being defended against are intrusive feelings about the research process, the subjects and the relationship between the two ... It is therefore crucial to acknowledge and attempt to understand what transferences and counter transferences might be telling us as researchers. (Walkerline et al. 2002: 186)

While researchers use different philosophical frameworks to understand the production of knowledge through social research, and think through the implications of conducting qualitative interviews, they do so within the context of other – more prosaic and institutional – parameters that govern the research process.

What does the institution of research governance procedures mean for how we think about interviews?

Research governance is a term covering a range of regulations, principles and standards that lay down what is considered good practice in research. The governance regime addresses issues such as risk assessment, health and safety, ethical conduct and so on. The institutionalization of social research regulation is often traced back to instances of bad practice in clinical research (such as taking and storing organs from dead babies without parental consent), from where the perceived need for governance expanded into social research, along with the general rise of an 'audit culture'. Research governance is said to safeguard research participants' interests and rights, protect researchers from allegations of bad practice by providing a clear framework for them to work within and promote and enhance research quality. Systems of research governance have the merit of ensuring that researchers undertake a full and reflexive consideration of the process of conducting research, thinking through the implications of their plans and practice.

Nonetheless, many qualitative researchers have been vocal in laying out what they regard as a highly bureaucratized and damaging ethics regulatory regime creep (e.g. see contributions to a debate section

in *Sociological Research Online*, 2010, <http://socresonline.org.uk/15/4>). The requirement for researchers to detail a range of aspects of their research process and gain approval from a regulatory body (whether university or other institutional base) has implications for the conduct of qualitative research interviews, especially for researchers who wish to conduct interviews within emancipatory/participatory or psychoanalytic approaches. The need to (a) detail what the research is about and the tools that will be used, and (b) provide written information sheets to research subjects and gain their written informed consent to participate, prior to conducting the research in order to gain approval to proceed, cuts across participant-led agendas and attempts to equalize research relationships. It does not sit well with the elicitation of free narratives that is the aim of psychoanalytic research interviews. Further, there is a risk that asking questions about certain, 'sensitive' subjects may be ruled out of interviews in advance by regulatory bodies, whether or not research participants want to talk about the issue. It is a moot question as to whether some of the classic social research studies, such as Whyte's study of status in gangs in the slums of Boston (*Street Corner Society*, discussed earlier), would have gained ethical approval under the current research governance regime.

What do advances in technology mean for how we practice and think about interviews?

Available technologies have long shaped the practice of qualitative interviews. Prior to the development in the 1950s of portable audio tape-recorders, now followed by even lighter and smaller digital recorders, researchers conducting interviews relied on memory. Whyte carried out the fieldwork for *Street Corner Society* (1993) in the 1930s, on which he remarks:

With my informants, I had to rely on memory. At first, I could recall very little. As I wrote my notes, I found that I was remembering more and more as time went on. I cannot claim that my notes are a verbatim report of all that had been said – and in the particular order and sequence. Nevertheless, when the informant made a strong positive or negative statement about somebody or

something, I could be almost positive that I had those exact words.
(1996b: 243)

Les Back (2010) provides an interesting assessment of the strengths and limitations of the tape recorder as the primary tool of qualitative research, stimulated by the 'death' of his own device. As part of this he ponders whether or not a recording tool that captures participants' spoken words verbatim confines the researcher through confusing socially shaped accounts with authentic truth (discussed further in Chapter 6). The technology of computer-mediated communication also reshapes the practice of interviewing and understanding the nature of interviews. Online interviewing, either synchronously or asynchronously, in public or private arenas, enables the transcendence of boundaries of time and space, reaching beyond the constraints of face-to-face contact. But there are concerns about the way that interviewing online can cut across the socio-emotional signals between researchers and subjects that take place in face-to-face interactions, about the 'truth' of identity and authenticity of experience claims, about the flows and bases of power, as well as the challenges for research governance and ethics (Hine 2001; James and Busher 2006). Clearly these concerns will have quite different implications within each of the various philosophical approaches discussed here. We follow up the process of online interviewing in Chapter 5.

The development and widespread availability of computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) that facilitates the analysis of transcribed qualitative interview texts, as well as graphics, audio and visual material, has generated discussions about its usefulness and implications (e.g. Séror 2005). In the context of our discussion here, this includes some tensions about what CAQDAS means for conceptions of the nature of interviews as they become 'fixed' as fact in electronic files, existing as a reality outside of the context of their production, potentially available as an independent product to the interaction and people that produced them. To what extent is it inherent in these technological advances – as Natasha Mauthner and Odette Parry have discussed in relation to qualitative interview data preservation and sharing through archives – that the foundational assumptions of modernism are reproduced, or at least in part form the implicit philosophical terms

in which researchers practising qualitative interviews engage with such technologies?:

[W]hat Bourdieu terms 'epistemic reflexivity' goes beyond the individual scholar and takes as its focus on analysis 'scientific practice', modes of knowledge production, and the 'epistemological unconscious' underpinning these. (Mauthner and Parry, 2009: 301)

In the chapters that follow, we go on to explore and reflect on the forms, settings, tools and practices of the interview mode of knowledge production.