ORAL HISTORY

UNDERSTANDING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

PATRICIA LEAVY

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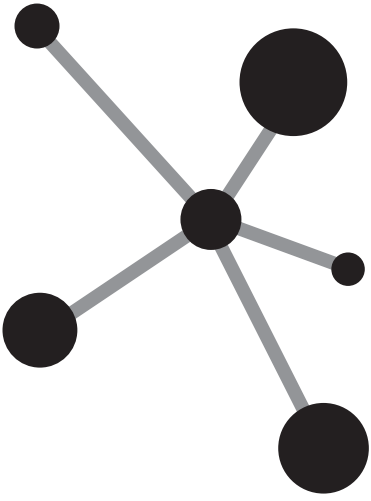

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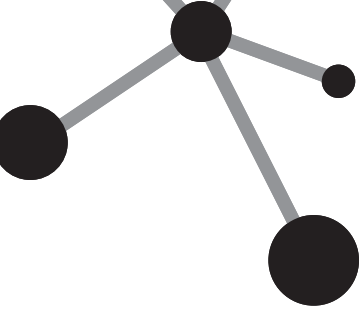

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INTRODUCTION

ORAL HISTORY is a method of qualitative interview that emphasizes participants' perspectives, and generally involves multiple open-ended interview sessions with each participant. Oral history has anthropological roots, with field researchers long having used this method (or what is now called oral history) to access the experiential knowledge of people living in field sites. Many of the cultures anthropologists have studied have themselves been based on oral traditions of knowledge transmission—the "passing down" down of family or community knowledge from generation to generation. Therefore, the extensive practice of oral history among anthropologists is grounded in an affinity between the goals of cultural anthropology and the particular contexts examined. However, it is historians who are credited with officially establishing oral history as a legitimate research method.

> Oral history was established in 1948 as a modern technique for historical documentation when Columbia University historian Allan Nevins began recording the memoirs of persons significant in American Life. (North American Oral History Association, as quoted by Thomson, 1998, p. 581)

Oral history is now a multidisciplinary method used in the humanities, social sciences, and interdisciplinary fields such as American studies, cultural studies and gender studies.

Sometimes people confuse *oral traditions* with oral history. An oral tradition is one in which stories are passed down through the generations. For example, some Native American traditions include handing down stories (Wilson, 1996). Oral history draws on the tenets of an oral tradition; however, the terms are not interchangeable. Oral history is a method of collecting narratives from individuals for the purpose of research.

In recent decades, feminist researchers have highlighted the possibilities of oral history in the social sciences. As a result, some mistakenly categorize oral history as a "feminist method." However, there is no doubt that feminist researchers have expanded our understanding and use of oral history, and thus I briefly review the affinity between feminism and oral history.

Second-wave feminist researchers have investigated the marginalization of women in social science research. They found that women's experiences and perspectives have been rendered invisible in positivist social research (which is generally quantitative). Therefore, in an effort to make women's experiences and perspectives a focus of social research, feminist research attempts to unearth women's subjugated knowledges.

Given the critique of positivism, it is not surprising that many feminist researchers have turned to qualitative approaches to research. Feminist qualitative researchers, working with human participants, bring a particular set of concerns to the research endeavor. First, feminist researchers often seek out marginalized persons and groups for inclusion in social research. This may mean working with research participants who are members of disenfranchised groups. This brings a particular set of issues to the research project. Second, as feminist researchers seek to unearth subjugated knowledges, they are searching for meaning from the perspective of those being studied. In order to get at this kind of meaning, researchers must build rapport with their participants, viewing the researcher–researched relationship as one of collaboration. Third, feminist researchers seek to contribute to the larger project of feminism, which necessarily imbues the process with an activist or public component. In short, feminist researchers

seek social change. Oral history can be both a scholarly and activist enterprise, contributing to people's empowerment and social change, often at the community level (Armitage & Gluck, 1998).

Oral history is an effective method for gaining in-depth knowledge from participants, from their perspective, and thus suits the needs of many feminist projects. In oral history, the researcher needs to be fully present with the person narrating his or her story. There are techniques that feminist researchers have developed and cultivated for oral history interview in order to better illuminate the participant's perspectives and experiences. These strategies are now often used by diverse researchers conducting oral history interviews, whether or not they are feminist. I review these strategies throughout this book.

Research examples throughout this book will illustrate that although many different kinds of researchers use oral history for data collection, disciplinary perspective can significantly alter the purpose or intent of an oral history project. For example, historians often use oral history as a means of documenting and preserving—filling in the historical record. In these instances, issues of archival deposit are central. Anthropologists typically aim at understanding different cultures from the perspectives of the people enmeshed within those contexts. Sociologists may use oral history as a means of linking individual (micro level) experiences with cultural, historical or structural (macro level) phenomena. Feminist and other critical researchers across disciplines may use oral history as a way of accessing subjugated voices. Of course, researchers in any of these fields can use this method for any of these reasons, or a combination thereof, as explicated later. This book concentrates primarily on oral history in the social sciences.

Philosophical Framework

All research methods are based on philosophical assumptions about the nature of the social world and assumptions about how research should proceed. These assumptions guide methodological decision making (although often under the surface). These philosophical assumptions can be thought of as the "philosophical substructure" of research (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). In the case

of oral history, these assumptions guide a researcher to, or away from, using oral history in a particular project, and also guide how the researcher employs the method.

There are two main sets of philosophical assumptions, ontological and epistemological. An ontological position is based on assumptions about the nature of the social world and, correspondingly, what can be known about it. An ontological position reflects answers to the following questions:

- What is the nature of social reality?
  - Is there a social reality that exists independent of social actors' experience of that reality?
  - Is the social world patterned and predicable?
  - Do subjective social actors bring different but valid experiences and viewpoints to bear on social research?
- How can social reality be studied?
  - What strategies of inquiry produce valid knowledge?
  - What is the value system guiding research?
  - What kinds of generalizations, if any, can be derived from data (about social life)? Or, can the data be transferred from one context to another? If so, on what basis?

An epistemological position is based on assumptions about the nature of the relationship between the researcher and research participants and, correspondingly, assumptions about how research should proceed. An epistemological position reflects answers to the following questions:

- How can we learn what we think we can know?
- Who is a knowing party in the research process?
  - Who is the author of social research? Who is an authority in the social research process?
  - What role does power play in this process? How does the researcher feel about this issue?
  - From whom can we learn what we think can be known?
- What is the relationship between the researcher and research participants?
  - How will the researcher attend to his or her relationship with the participants?

- Will collaboration extend beyond data collection into analysis, interpretation, and/or writing?

All of these assumptions guide methodological decision making. Assumptions about the nature of the social world impact what we think we can study, and how we can best study it.

For example, a positivist ontological understanding of social reality typically results in a quantitative approach to research. This approach views research as an event during which a series of pre-planned procedures are followed. This is because positivism views the social world as patterned and therefore predictable. The job of social researchers is to make predictions about the relationships between variables (making hypotheses) and then testing these hypotheses. In order to accomplish this, researchers are encouraged to follow the tenets of the "scientific method," which relies on a particular conception of "objectivity." So, for example, researchers might create a measurement instrument (such as a survey) that can be administered in a purportedly value-neutral context to a sample of statistically selected respondents. The researcher is privileged as the authority, and maintains this authority via his/her objective and linear application of research procedures. The study can later be replicated in order to strengthen the reliability of the research findings. This is an example of how ontological and epistemological views guide methodological decision making, even though this often occurs below the surface.

Qualitative research is conducted from diverse ontological and epistemological positions, including at times positivism (or post-positivism; for a full discussion see Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). It is therefore difficult to generalize about the philosophical assumptions guiding qualitative research. The same is true for oral history in particular, which can be conducted from many different viewpoints. With this said, there are some common philosophical assumptions grounding oral history research.

Ontologically, oral history is based on a conception of research as a *process*, not an event. The practice of oral history assumes that meaning isn't "waiting out there" to be discovered, but rather that meaning is generated during the research process. In other words, we build meaning through the generation of an interview narrative, and the analysis and interpretation of that narrative.

Social knowledge does not exist independent of the research process, but is created *through* the process. Researchers actively participate in the knowledge-building process. Because research is a process, there is no one correct way to do it. Research is viewed as fluid, adaptable, and malleable. Likewise, as opposed to a linear model or step-by-step protocol, oral history research may follow an iterative or back-and-forth model. Procedures may change during the course of research based on initial impressions or findings. The goals of this kind of research vary greatly, and might include exploration, description, explanation, theory building, or social action.

These assumptions about how research can and should proceed also inform understandings about how to study social reality. Oral history relies on a highly inductive (open-ended) interview format. No two interview sessions are the same. Instead of disavowing one's place in the research process, oral history requires researchers to attend to their own position in the research process. Therefore, the method can be employed in an engaged and value-laden context (as would be the case in feminist or social action research).

Finally, epistemologically, oral history positions the researcher and participant in a collaborative relationship. Researchers are not conceptualized as "the knowing party" with full authority over knowledge production. Researchers and participants are placed on the same plane during data collection. During data collection (the interview sessions) a reciprocal relationship is sought—a relationship in which both parties are integral to the data generation process. In this regard, both the researcher and participant may guide the direction of the interview.

Frisch (1990) coined the term *shared authority* to denote the unique collaborative nature of knowledge production in oral history. Frisch notes the word *author* is located within the word *authority*. This implies the "author" of oral history research claims authority over the resulting knowledge claims. This begs the question: Who is the author of an oral history? There is no simple answer to this question. However, oral historians do recognize that epistemological issues of collaboration and authorship are grounded in larger issues of power and knowledge production. Frisch's term *shared authority* extends well beyond data collection,

referring also to the extent to which data interpretation is collaborative. Levels of collaboration during data interpretation vary greatly, from researchers taking sole authority over interpretation and representation to highly interactive interpretive processes. These issues are explored at greater length in later chapters.

For now, one final note regarding terminology denoting the researcher–researched relationship. Researchers have different terms for labeling research participants, and these terms are not interchangeable; they reflect epistemological assumptions. Quantitative researchers often use the terms *respondent* or *research subject*. Oral historians rarely use these terms, because of the collaborative nature of the method. Many oral historians use the term *narrator*. This term is often used when historians conduct oral history research and "narrators" are filling in a gap in the historical record. The term is also used in narrative inquiry, when the narrative or storytelling process itself is paramount. In this book I employ the term *participant*, as is frequently used in the social science literature as a way of accounting for the collaborative nature of oral history.

Oral History: A Unique Method of Qualitative Interview

In general, qualitative methods of interview all seek to gather data directly from individuals. The kind of information sought varies, but usually covers the following dimensions:

- Personal experiences
- Memories of events
- Attitudes, values, beliefs
- Opinions and perspectives

Oral history is a unique, qualitative method of interview. Oral history follows an inductive and open-ended interview model. This interview format involves a process of storytelling: the researcher guides a process where each participant narrates his or her story. The data are generated in a collaborative exchange, in which the researcher and research participant are co-creators in the knowledge-building process. Meaning is not "out there" waiting to be revealed; rather, meaning emerges throughout the collaborative oral history process. Oral histories yield rich descriptive

data and may be a part of exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory studies. Oral histories can also be used to generate theory. Moreover, oral histories can be used in social action research.

Differing from qualitative in-depth interviews, oral history interviews typically span several interview sessions with each participant, sometimes over a significant period of time. Oral history projects typically involve fewer participants than in-depth interview projects. Some projects focus entirely on one research participant. Researchers are always seeking great depth. A focus on depth may sacrifice some breadth, but as with all qualitative research projects, these decisions should be made in accord with particular research goals. Additionally, while in-depth interviews tend to be topic or issue focused, oral history interviews often cover an extensive part of a participant's life, seeking to uncover processes and link individual experiences with the larger context in which those experiences occur. Patel (2005) used oral history in her social work research on transracial adoption. She notes the following:

> As a methodological approach, oral (hi)story interviews seek to access the socially constructed reflective thoughts about an individual's life. That is not only accounts of their life experiences, but also *how* and *why* they have lived their life in the way that they have, and the *thoughts* and *ideas* that have guided their everyday *behavior* and *interaction* with others. (p. 338)

Oral history studies often focus on a particular topic; however, data are generally collected from large periods of time in a participant's life, so that questions are not limited to the "topic" at hand. As Patel (2005) further notes, oral history therefore provides "insight into the thought processes behind behavior" (p. 337).

For example, in an in-depth interview project focusing on how working mothers balance work in the public sphere with parenting, questions might be limited to a certain set of topics (or "lines of inquiry"; Weiss, 1995) such as the following: her job and work environment; her home life; her support system (which may or may not include a partner who may or may not co-parent); the household division of labor; childcare; external pressures on time; internal pressures, stress, or feelings about balancing parenting

and work; financial resources/issues and other pragmatic concerns. An oral history project may focus on the same general topic, how working mothers balance work in the public sphere with parenting; however, the interview sessions would not be limited to these topics. For that matter, the discussion of these topics might only emerge deep into the interview sessions. Rather, the first interview session might begin with the narrator talking about her childhood—her home environment, how she was parented, school, her early ideas about her life and how those ideas changed over time (including assumptions and aspirations regarding work, partnering, marriage, children). During the data-generation and analysis process, these experiences could be linked to later experiences regarding how the participant has structured her life and how she feels about it. In addition to making connections between different micro-level experiences, this kind of process may also facilitate a macro-level analysis of the oral history data. For example, perhaps during the interview sessions, information is revealed whereby the participant's mother's experiences with work and parenting are disclosed in ways that contrast their experiences in the context of changing gender norms in the larger society.

Oral history is based in an oral tradition of transmitting knowledge. In essence, this method presupposes that individual actors have valuable knowledge to share based on their life experiences, including their behaviors, rituals, attitudes, values and beliefs. It is during an open-ended, highly unstructured series of interviews that the researcher and participant engage in a process whereby these experiences are unearthed, reflected on, interlinked, and knowledge is collaboratively created. Therefore, data are generated from the perspective of the research participants who work jointly with the researcher. Meaning develops out of this collaborative process.

In order to illustrate the distinctiveness of oral history as a research method, it is helpful to contrast it with other interview methods. Interview methods can be placed on a continuum, with oral history near one end of that continuum.

Biographic narrative interpretive method (Jones, 2003) is the most open-ended form of qualitative interview. This method employs a *minimalist passive interviewing technique* in which the researcher engages in an ongoing interpretive process. (For the sake

Table 1.1
Qualitative Interview Continuum[1]

Most Open-Ended		**Most Structured**	
Minimalist biography interview	Oral history	In-depth interview	Structured interview

[1] I do not include focus group interviews in this comparative discussion of qualitative interviews, as I am focusing on one-on-one methods of interview. Focus group interviews can, however, be conducted along a continuum from very open-ended formats to highly structured formats.

of simplicity, I refer to this as *minimalist biography interview*.) This kind of interview requires a minimum of two interview sessions with each participant. In the first interview session, which generally lasts 45–60 minutes, a "minimalist passive" interview technique is employed. This is an interview situation where "non-interruption" is practiced (Jones, 2003, p. 62). The researcher begins with one open, "narrative inducing" question and then proceeds to allow the participant to tell his or her story without interruption (p. 61). The building of rapport between the researcher and participant is vital during this kind of interview session. Rapport is maintained via appropriate visual cues, such as eye contact and nodding. This approach to interview is based on the idea that preconceived questions, or even thematic questions may obscure parts of potential data that are "nested" within something else (p. 61). After the initial non-interruption interview, a process of analysis occurs. Then, a second interview session occurs where follow-up questions are asked. The second interview is again followed by analysis and, depending on the need, a third interview session (and analysis).

Jones (2003) notes "gestalt" as a central theoretical principle when working with this method. He defines gestalt as, "the constructed shape of a story, through theme, motif and/or various agendas—hidden or otherwise" (p. 62). By using an interview technique of non-interruption, the gestalt of the participant's story retains its integrity. Jones developed this interview approach in

order to access "essence," which he suggests may be flattened, diminished, or rendered invisible by traditional interview practices.

Next we have oral history, which will be discussed shortly, but as noted it is an open-ended form of interview in which a participant and researcher collaborate as the participant shares his or her story. There is often a topic under investigation; however, the participant has ample room to discuss a range of experiences, ideas, and feelings that may or may not be directly or indirectly linked to the research topic. Oral history has a much longer history than its contemporary, minimalist biographic method; however, both methods draw on many of the same principles regarding allowing the participant considerable space to speak from their own point of view. The strongest oral history transcripts contain pages at a time of only the participant's voice, guided but not interrupted by the researcher (of course this often isn't the case, and oral histories can be very useful even if the researcher has to do more prompting and questioning). In the social sciences, the most valuable oral history projects ask critical questions about social life that cut across individuals' experience (Shopes, 2002, p. 590).

Next on the qualitative interview continuum, we have in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews are topic focused. They typically involve one interview session per participant, lasting anywhere from 45–75 minutes, and are conducted with a larger pool of participants than oral history interviews. So, for example, a study about the experience of divorce may involve in-depth interviews with a sample of recently divorced women and men. The interviews would likely focus on the marriage, what led to the divorce, the divorce process, the process of "uncoupling," and how one rebuilds or adjusts. In other words, the interviews would focus on issues directly pertaining to the topic.

Typically, prior to in-depth interviews, researchers create interview guides. These may include topical areas/themes and specific questions that will be asked. The extent to which a researcher structures the interview guide depends on the extent to which the interviews are to be (un)structured. The degree of "structure" exists on a continuum ranging from highly unstructured to highly structured. In-depth interviews typically involve open-ended questions, where participants have a lot of latitude with their responses, and may involve some follow-up or interspersed closed-ended

questions (questions with a limited set of possible responses, such as yes or no). When considering how structured or unstructured in-depth interviews will be, one must consider that there is a balancing act between depth and breadth. How much depth do you seek from each participant? How much breadth do you seek from each participant (how much ground do you wish to cover?) How much breadth do you seek from the participant pool as a whole? Also, do you intend to make comparisons among participants? If so, you may opt for a more structured interview format, which allows for higher comparability.

Finally, we have structured interviews. These kinds of interviews allow for a larger pool of participants. Interview guides are highly structured, and each interview session follows the interview guide. Therefore, all interviewees are asked the same questions in the same order. The questions may be open-ended; however, if the participant starts to stray toward other topics, the interviewer steers them back to the questions on the guide. Structured interviews sacrifice depth for breadth. They allow for high levels of comparison between different participants, or subsets of participants if the researcher chooses to divide participants during analysis. For instance, in the example regarding divorce, a researcher might seek an equal number of male and female participants, and then later compare the answers of the participants on the basis of gender. A structured interview aids this kind of comparison.

There is nothing inherently good or bad about any of these interview strategies. Research methods should always be selected for their "fit" with research purposes (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). In other words, different interview strategies are more effective for particular kinds of research questions. Consider the following questions as you select an interview method:

- What kind of data are you interested in?
- Do you have a specific topic about which you want to ascertain data?
- How much background information are you interested in?
- Do you have a specific list of questions you seek to gain responses to?
- What size sample of participants are you seeking? (Consider practical issues such as time and money, as well as your intent with respect to generalizability, breadth and depth).

- Do you need to seek similar data from all of the research participants?
- Do you want to compare the responses of different participants or groupings of participants?
- How much depth are you after?
- How much breadth are you after?

There are several distinguishing factors of the oral history method as compared with other interview methods: (1) tapping into processes; (2) micro–macro linkages; (3) comprehensive understanding; (4) bearing witness and filling in the historical record; (5) collaboration in the meaning-making process; and (6) a focus on the participants' perspectives (which may or may not be the case with in-depth interviews). I briefly review each distinguishing feature, and then summarize the comparison of oral history interview with other interview methods in Table 1.2.

Tapping into processes. Researchers can study process in various ways, via the oral history method. That is to say, oral history may tap into any combination of the following: (1) historical processes, (2) agency within shifting contexts, and (3) holistic understandings of life experiences. Let's revisit the topic of women balancing work in the public sphere with parenting, in order to illustrate how oral history can get at these three processes.

With respect to *historical processes*, an oral history project could explore how changing gender norms, including the gendered division of labor in both the public and private spheres, shapes women's experiences balancing work and parenting. In terms of *agency within shifting contexts*, oral history could look at how women's experiences, challenges, and feelings change over time as do other factors on both the micro and macro levels. On the micro level these might include factors such as relationship status, work roles, age of child/children, health, health of aging parents, and personal financial circumstances. On the macro level, factors might include the state of the economy, the real estate market, changes in gender norms and expectations, and political changes. Finally, with respect to *holistic understandings of life experiences*, particular experiences are viewed and understood contextually. So, for example, how work and family were experienced growing up, and the participant's reflections on those issues, serve as part of the basis for making sense out of the participant's own experiences

of constructing a work–parenting balance over time. Further, oral history can shed light on critical experiences in the participant's life *and* how and why those experiences are critical (Patel, 2005, p. 339). So, a participant may note a family discussion about a financial problem in childhood as a critical experience, as well as why and in what ways the experience was particularly meaningful or pivotal.

Micro–macro linkages. Oral history connects biographical experience with the social/historical context in which biographies are played out. In other words, oral history allows researchers to make links between micro-level experiences and the macro-level environments that shape and contain those experiences. These kinds of projects are always important; however, in times of great social change (such as globalization) or social upheaval (such as an economic recession) these uses of oral history are particularly salient.

For example, oral history interviews can be used to understand how development issues, or other issues pertaining to globalization, impact people at the individual and community level. How does the placing of soda factories across India impact the lives of the people living in those and neighboring communities? What were the daily lives of men, women, and children like before the factories? How, if at all, has daily life changed? More specifically, what impact has this had on work, education (particularly for girls), gender roles, and family roles? How have related environmental changes (i.e., polluted water) impacted people's cooking, water gathering, personal hygiene practices, finances, etc?

Another example would be a study focusing on the impact of the Iraq war on Iraqis. Broad questions explored might include: How are individuals experiencing the U.S. occupation, the destruction, the political regime shift, economic changes, and the rebuilding process? What was daily life like before the war? What is it like now? How do individuals and families adapt to these changes? What coping strategies do parents teach their children? How have these changes impacted people's personal relationships including courtships, friendships, marriages, and parental relationships? One could imagine a similar study about the impact of the economic crisis on individuals in the United States. What was daily life like before the crisis, and how has it changed? How have

interpersonal relationships been impacted by job loss or loss of wealth?

Comprehensive understanding. Because data are generated in open-ended, inductive and extensive interview sessions, oral history seeks comprehensive or holistic understanding. Instead of focusing on a limited set of experiences linked to the topic of the interview, as is generally the case in qualitative in-depth interviews, oral history interviews cover long periods of time and a range of related life experiences. This allows researchers to gain a far more comprehensive understanding of the participant's experiences. Researchers can access data about what experiences, beliefs, events, and circumstances have led up to other experiences, beliefs, events, and circumstances. These issues are not isolated, but revealed contextually. Moreover, chronologically disparate elements in a participant's life can be linked, during analysis, in the process of building meaning holistically. This is evident by the example of connecting childhood family life with later efforts at constructing a work and family life.

Bearing witness and filling in the historical record. Oral history interviews are often conducted as a way to fill in the historical record. This can occur in two ways.

First, an event of import has happened, and oral historians seek to document firsthand accounts while they are still available. In other words, those who have borne witness share their stories for the historical record. For example, there have been numerous oral history projects conducted with Holocaust survivors (and those various individuals and groups who helped Jews and other persecuted people survive). This research is important because it provides firsthand accounts of these events—firsthand accounts that will otherwise die with the individuals who have experienced the event. The depth and complexity of these experiences can only be properly understood via firsthand renderings. Most Holocaust oral history projects have occurred decades after the event, as researchers have realized there is limited time to document people's experiences. Sometimes the data collection happens right after an event has occurred. For example, the terrorist attacks of September 11th inspired numerous oral history projects aiming to document the experiences of survivors, family members, rescue workers, residents of the affected areas, and others directly impacted by the event.

Second, individuals or groups that historically have been marginalized, silenced, disenfranchised, or otherwise had their experiences and perspectives left out of the historical record, are often sought out for inclusion in oral history projects. This was the primary reason social historians began developing the oral history method into a legitimized strategy of inquiry. By seeking out disenfranchised groups, such as women, people of color, the poor, the disabled, and the sexually marginalized, oral historians seek to fill gaps in the social historical record. This kind of research is, therefore, generally conducted within a social justice framework regardless of other theoretical influences.

Collaboration in the meaning-making process. There is a continuum regarding the extent to which an oral history project relies on collaboration between the researcher and participant(s). However, oral history necessarily involves collaboration in the data generation process. Where there is more variability is in the analysis, interpretation, and/or representation processes. With respect to data collection, the researcher and participant together create a narrative (the interview transcript). In other words, the narrative is produced via an interaction between the researcher and participant. Moreover, the participant is positioned as a valuable knowledge source.

Collaboration and the resulting meaning-making process is a central aspect of oral history interview, and will be highlighted throughout this book. To begin with, the unique attention to the collaborative generation of knowledge in oral history is expanded in the following section on the epistemological and theoretical framework underpinning oral history practice (as will be noted, a key issue is the presumption that meaning is not "waiting out there" but must be co-created or built).

A focus on the participants' perspectives. The data collection process in oral history interviews highlights the participants' perspectives in three main ways: the participants are authorities on their knowledge; participants have a significant hand in shaping the content of the interviews; and, participants shape the form of the interviews.

In oral history interviews, the participants are privileged as knowing parties with valuable knowledge to share. Their subjective

experiences and perspectives are the locus of knowledge building. It is the researcher's task to facilitate their narrative process.

Because of the open-ended and unstructured nature of oral history interviews, the participants have a lot of leeway to determine the content of the interview sessions. Although initially guided with a question or questions, and later prompted or questioned as needed, they have a big hand in creating the direction of the narrative, the topics covered, and the language used. The researcher does not know the different directions the interview will go in, how much ground will be covered in any one session, and what issues will emerge. Highly structured interviews ask questions that may already contain assumptions about what the possible answers will be. For example, the question, "How did your life change when you bought the house?" is a very specific question that assumes the participant's life changed when they bought their house. A more open-ended approach would allow the participant to talk or not talk about this topic in the course of telling their story. Should the issue of buying their house come up, the oral historian might query, "What was that like for you?"—which, in contrast to the earlier question, makes no particular assumptions and implies no particular "right" answers.

Finally, each participant narrates his or her story differently. There is no one or correct way for a person to narrate their story (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Rather, there are diverse communicative styles and narrative forms that can shape interviews. Narratives styles might be influenced by a range of factors, including but not limited to age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, education, social class, and geographic location (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Despite great differences in narrative forms, research on oral history practice has revealed a finite set of patterns with which people tell their stories. The four primary narrative styles are: (1) unified, (2) segmented, (3) conversational (Etter-Lewis, 1991), and (4) episodic (Kohler-Reissman, 1987). I discuss these narrative styles, and what they may reveal about participants, in greater detail in Chapter 2 during my discussion of listening; however, at this point I briefly note the main feature of each style.

A "unified" narrative style occurs when a participant responds to a question by chronologically explaining their experience and

providing illustrative examples (Etter-Lewis, 1991). The participant remains focused on the topic or question at hand.

A "segmented" narrative style occurs when a participant responds to a question by sharing an array of statements that may appear fragmented or disconnected (Etter-Lewis, 1991). Although some researchers may not be used to this style (at first), this kind of shifting narrative is a valid way that some participants put their stories together.

A "conversational" narrative style involves a participant recounting past conversations as a way of answering questions or illustrating points (Etter-Lewis, 1991). Although an indirect way of responding to questions, such a style may result in important and descriptive answers in which details are emphasized.

Finally, an "episodic narrative" style relies on a participant speaking by telling stories as episodes in their lives (Kohler-Riessman, 1987). The episodes are thematically driven (not chronological) (Kohler-Riessman, 1987). This approach bears similarities to both segmented and conversational styles.

Any research participant may adopt one or more of these narrative styles during the course of the interview process. A participant's speech pattern may shift as they answer different questions, creating their own narrative pattern. These shifts in storytelling styles may themselves provide important data. For example, they may clue the researcher in to places of certainty, places of emotional distress, places where language fails, and so forth.

Finally, it is important to review the potential benefits that oral history participants may experience. Oral history interviews have the potential to be uniquely beneficial to research participants; whether or not participants benefit, and the extent to which they do, varies from project to project. The experience of sharing one's experiences, thoughts, and feelings can be affirming for participants. They may not otherwise have the opportunity to share their knowledge, which can be a validating and rewarding experience. In this vein, participants might find the interview process to be empowering. Further, the interview process gives participants an opportunity to reflect on their life experiences, which may lead to greater understanding and self-awareness. Patel (2005) notes that oral history involves a "reflexive construction of social life" (p. 328).

Table 1.2
A Summary Comparison of Interview Methods

Interview Methods	Distinguishing Features
Minimalist biography interview	Most open-ended, employs minimal passive interviewing technique, ongoing interpretive process, minimum of two interview sessions, begins with one open "narrative" inducing question.
Oral history	Open-ended, taps into processes, micro–macro links, comprehensive understanding, bearing witness/filling in the historical record, participant–researcher collaboration, emphasizes participants' points of view.
In-depth interview	Topic is focused, one interview session per participant, interview guides, continuum of structure, depth is valued over breadth.
Structured interview	Larger pool of participants, breadth is valued over depth, high levels of comparison.

The process of speaking allows participants to self-reflect as they (re)construct their story (Patel, 2005, p. 329).

Now that the distinguishing features are clearer, it's time to examine when and why a researcher might use oral history.

Research Purposes and Research Questions

Oral history always seeks people's subjective experiences and perspectives. However, there are a range of purposes for which oral history data is useful. For the sake of simplicity, I categorize the research purposes as follows, although in research practice there is often slippage and overlap between categories. The major purposes are: (1) filling in the historical record; (2) understanding

people's subjective experiences of historical events; (3) understanding people's subjective experiences of historical periods or periods of social change; (4) understanding people's subjective experiences of current or recent events; (5) contributing to the understanding of topical areas; and (6) gaining "community" experiential knowledge.

1) *Filling in the historical record*: Arguably, filling in the historical record is an aspect of all oral history research. Oral history projects seek to gather data about firsthand experiences from those who have directly experienced or borne witness to the topic of inquiry. "Bearing witness" is a central feature of this method. For example, as noted earlier, there have been numerous efforts at ascertaining oral histories from Holocaust survivors so that their experiences are documented. Some oral historians' sole purpose is to fill a gap in the historical record: to include firsthand accounts that have not been documented, to include the experiences and perspectives of groups that historically have been excluded, and to document the firsthand experiences of events that previously have not been studied. This kind of research is most frequently conducted by historians, or by agencies that emerge for the sole purpose of documenting some group's experiences in relation to a particular event or topic. The main goals are documentation, preservation, and archival.

The archival issue is of central importance with this kind of oral history research. Oral historians focusing on filling in the historical record deposit their interview transcripts in oral history archives. This allows the oral history interviews to be preserved, while usually making them available to others. In recent years, digitization has made an enormous impact on archival and retrieval (discussed later). Although this book focuses on oral history as practiced by social scientists, with goals that typically extend beyond filling in the record, in Chapters 3 and 4 I do discuss how methodological choices about editing transcripts are critical in this kind of oral history research.

2) *Understanding people's subjective experiences of historical events*. Oral history is well suited for accessing people's subjective experiences of historical events of which they were a part, or to which they bore witness. This is because the method aids people as they remember, recall, restory, and retell their story. Moreover,

because oral history allows people to openly narrate their stories, participants are given space to reflect, reconstruct and build meaning out of their past experiences. For example, Crothers (2002) launched a project at Indiana University Southeast in which undergraduate students interviewed WWII veterans, Korean War veterans, and people who lived during the Great Depression. Although the topical area was historical events, the study, involving community residents, had both community-building and educational benefits.

3) *Understanding people's subjective experiences of historical periods or periods of social change*. Oral history is an excellent method for assessing people's subjective experiences of shifting historical periods, because the method emphasizes processes and thus examines how experiences unfold over time. Further, oral history places individual biographies within larger cultural contexts, making vital linkages between the two. Research of this kind can vary greatly, so I provide a couple of examples.

Botting (2000) wanted to understand the experiences of female domestic servants who had migrated from coastal communities to a mill town in Newfoundland for employment in the 1920s and 1930s. Oral history was useful for getting at the experiences of both migration and domestic work within a historically specific gendered context.

Similarly, Ryan (2009) used oral history to understand the experiences of women who served in the Navy and Coast Guard during World War II. Ryan notes that many participants diminished the importance of their wartime contributions with statements such as, "I didn't do anything important." She explored this issue and came to find that the participants did not intend to downplay their military service, but were rather using phrases that fit in with their perceptions of society's gender expectations. This illustrates the unique capability of oral history to look at how cultural frames shape people's experiences. In studies with multiple participants, patterns may emerge.

4) *Understanding people's subjective experiences of current or recent events*. Oral history interviews are an excellent tool for gaining in-depth, firsthand knowledge about current events. When oral history is used for this purpose, data are collected while the experiences are still fresh in participants' memories.

Mears (2008) used oral histories (in conjunction with other qualitative methods) in order to understand the experiences of Columbine High School parents regarding the 1999 shootings and aftermath. Mears had a child at Columbine during the shootings, and used her personal experiences as the impetus for her project. Moreover, her insider status gave her needed access and insights. Mears notes that some of the participants gained comfort through reflecting on their experiences.

Since only days after the 2001 terrorist attacks, efforts have been made at collecting oral history interviews from September 11th survivors, rescue workers, volunteers, and others living or working near Ground Zero. For example, Bearman and Marshall Clark (2002) cofounded "The September 11, 2001, Oral History Narrative and Memory Project" at Columbia University. This project focused on understanding the development of individual and collective memory. They sought to understand the role of the media and government in how individuals came to make sense of and cope with the event. This is an example of how oral history can be used to tap into the process of memory-building as it is unfolding. Further, this illustrates the power of oral history to explore links between individual lives and large-scale cultural contexts.

Sloan (2008) conducted an oral history project about the aftermath of 2005's Hurricane Katrina. His research addressed issues of emotional trauma, historical distance, objectivity, and reflection. Oral history projects that deal with trauma, particularly recent trauma, illustrate the importance of ongoing ethical reflection.

5) *Contributing to understanding of topical areas*. Oral history interviews can be used in order to study topical areas similarly to other methods of qualitative interview. A researcher would choose oral history over other interview strategies if they are interested in the linkages between individual biographies and culture. This becomes clearer with an illustration.

For example, oral history has been used to study body image. I conducted oral history research with a female college student struggling with an eating disorder and related challenges. The analysis of her interview transcripts suggested that both psychological and sociocultural factors formed a "matrix" in which her body image issues emerged (see Leavy & Sardi Ross, 2006). The project looked at a range of "growing up" issues such as sibling

relationships, parental relationships, parents' divorce, elementary school friendships, and so forth, as well as sociocultural influences such as media consumption. Oral history served this project because it allowed for the exploration of social processes as they interact with individual biography.

6) *Gaining "community" experiential knowledge.* Oral history interviews can be used to study the experiences of people bound by a shared sense of community; these are often referred to as "community oral history projects." These projects consist of interviews conducted with members of a group defined by a geographical place or a shared social identity (for example, the gay community, the art community, the medical community; Shopes, 2002, p. 588). Many projects combine both meanings of the term "community" (for example, jazz musicians in New Orleans, street performers in NYC, steelworkers in Buffalo; Shopes, 2002, p. 588). Shopes (2002) posits oral history as an opportunity for public history (and I would add public sociology). She advocates conceptualizing community oral history studies around a historical issue or problem, so that we are not just documenting experience but also making sense of it in ways that are relevant beyond individuals. Shopes suggests considering the following when structuring the interviews:

> How an individual's experience is part of something bigger, and what sorts of questions make that connection, if not for the interviewee, then for the researcher (p. 596).

Villarreal (2006) conducted a community oral history project about Mexican American women in the music community in South Texas. She suggests oral history was the only method she could use to document the experiences of singers and music industry businesswomen in rural Mexican American communities. Villarreal's research helped locate sites in the development of the Spanish-language music industry (including parks, church halls, dance halls, and cantinas) and chronicled the experiences of women in this industry (interactions, travel, and so forth).

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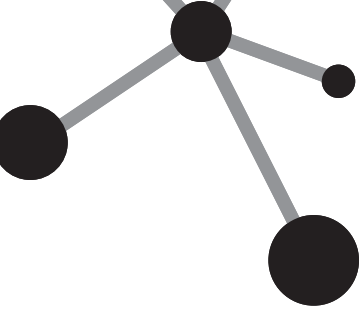


2

RESEARCH DESIGN

RESEARCH DESIGN choices are critical to understanding how a researcher writes up his or her methods and findings, and how those write-ups should be evaluated. As oral history can be employed in many different ways, there are no cookie-cutter research design strategies that can simply be followed and assessed by predetermined criteria. Rather, researchers using oral history need to make a host of research design choices—choices regarding methodology—and these are the choices that are explained, contextualized and justified in the methods write-up. Moreover, methodological decision making in terms of design, data collection, and analysis, all come to bear on how findings are reported. It is, therefore, the task of this chapter to review the major research design strategies that must be considered in an oral history project. For organizational purposes I divide my discussion into three categories: (1) design, (2) data collection, and (3) data analysis. In some projects these are artificial divides, as data collection and analysis may occur as an iterative or back-and-forth process (which is elaborated later). It is also important to note that the strategies and examples offered should be viewed as possibilities,

not mandates, as they cannot possibly touch on all of the ways one might approach their project.

This chapter focuses on projects in which original oral history interviews are being collected. However, many oral history projects rely on using preexisting oral histories (and there are many repositories/archives were these can be found). If the study you are conducting or reviewing relies on extant interview transcripts (preexisting interview transcripts) you can skip the irrelevant sections of this chapter. I would first like to briefly note two special considerations when using preexisting interviews. First, if the audio tapes are available in addition to transcripts, it is recommended that you listen to them—this greatly assists with analysis and interpretation. Transcripts are a flattened version of the interview (missing tone, emphasis, emotionality, etc.). Second, review any available documentation regarding how and why the interviews were collected (information about the interviewer, the research purpose, the interview guide—whatever is available). This will assist with analysis and interpretation.

Research Design: The Architectural Plan for Qualitative Research

Research design choices are the foundation of a qualitative research study. The cumulative impact of design choices is a particular methodology that will be employed in the study. Research design determines both how a study will be framed and how it will be carried out. Research design thus results in an action plan regarding how research will proceed; however, much like architectural plans for a building, this plan may be modified throughout the research process to accommodate new insights or unforeseen problems.

The first design issues to consider all center on *framing* your study. These address the what, why, and who of your study. The first choice is *topic selection*. Oral history interviews are useful for gathering data about a wide range of topics. As noted in Chapter 1, possible topics include people's firsthand experiences with historical or current events, their experiences during a historical period, "community" membership, and a vast array of topical areas (drug use/recovery, balancing work and parenting, body image,

homophobia, racism, and so forth). When selecting a topic, consider what you are interested in—does one of your interests lead you to a researchable topic? Practical issues such as funding should also be considered—are there grant opportunities attached to specific topics? Is there a need for qualitative research in a particular area? Oral history research should, in some way, be useful.

Once you have selected a general topic, it is time to conduct a literature review (some researchers formulate research questions prior to conducting a literature review, particularly if they have previous experience studying the topic). A literature review will tell you what research has already been done on your topic, which will assist you as you narrow down your topic into a research purpose statement and your guiding research question(s). Oral history research should ideally fill a gap in our knowledge, so it is vital to know what has and has not been done before. This information may guide you toward exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory research, may give you greater insights into your topic, and may help you determine if there is a gap in our knowledge that you can address. It is important to understand how your study sits in relation to other studies.

Next it is time to formulate your research purpose statement and guiding research question(s). Research purpose statements should be clear and focused. When formulating your research purpose statement, try to answer the following question: What, specifically, are you studying, and why? Your statement should be well informed, demonstrating that you know something about your topic based on a literature review and/or previous experience. An effective research purpose statement clarifies the purpose of the study while identifying guiding concepts, variables, and/or issues. Consider the following questions as you formulate your research purpose statement:

- Are you filling a gap in our knowledge?
- Are you documenting previously excluded perspectives?
- Are you aiming to explore, describe, or explain?
- Are you aiming to promote social action?
- Are you studying the relationship between variables in lived experience?

Once you have drafted your research purpose it is also important to review it with the following questions in mind:

- Is it clear?
- Can you research your purpose—is it realistic, doable?
- Is it a worthwhile research purpose? (Are you attempting to learn something new, or include previously excluded perspectives, or conduct social justice oriented research? Is there value in doing the research?)

Next, it is time to construct broad questions aimed at focusing your research. Again, these questions should be clear. Your questions are aimed at helping you fulfill your research purpose. These are not the questions you are directly asking participants, but rather the questions you seek to answer with your research. Consider the following as you formulate your research questions:

- What do you want to know about your topic?
- Are your questions open-ended, allowing for a multiplicity of findings (which is vital in oral history research)?
- Are your questions answerable through oral history interviews?
- Will answering your questions help you achieve your purpose?
- Do your questions extend beyond individuals to broader themes of social life (Patel, 2005)?

Here are examples of ineffective and effective research purpose statements:

Example 1. The purpose of this research is to study divorce.

Example 2. The purpose of this research is to study the experience of divorce for stay-at-home mothers. This research is intended to fill a gap in our knowledge about identity formation.

Example 1 is not a good research purpose statement. Divorce may be a general topic that one wishes to study; however, the purpose statement is not focused enough to actually conduct oral history research. By contrast, Example 2 clearly identifies the subject matter, the focus on experiential knowledge, the particular population of interest, and the usefulness of the research.

Working with the second research purpose statement, let's look at some possible ineffective and effective research questions.

Question 1a: Did participants' lives change when they got divorced?

Question 1b: How have participants' lives changed through the divorce process?

Question 1a is ineffective because it is a closed-ended question that can be answered with a yes or no. By contrast, Question 1b gets at the same idea, but allows for a multiplicity of data to emerge. Moreover, Question 1b views divorce as a process as opposed to an event, again speaking to the range of experiences participants may have, and how those experiences may change over time. The ability to capture process is a strength of oral history, and should be maximized.

Question 2a: Why did participants choose to be stay-at-home mothers?

Question 2b: How do participants explain the process by which they and their spouses made work and family decisions?

Question 2a is ineffective because it presumes that each participant has a simple answer to the question. The framing of the question again overlooks *process*. Moreover, the question assumes that each participant made these decisions herself, and does not account for the possible role her spouse played. Finally, the question does not necessarily open up a dialogue about "work" (prior work, career aspirations, finances, and so forth) but rather emphasizes parenting. Question 2b considers a range of issues pertaining to the process each participant has gone through relative to work and family. Moreover, the question includes the role or influence of spouses in this process.

Question 3a: How do participants' characterize their marriage?

Question 3b: How do participants describe how their relationship with their former spouse has evolved from when they first met to the present?

Question 3a narrows down what the researcher is looking for, and what the researcher might code after data collection. It is possible

that participants may say something negative about their marriage; however, it is also possible that, if given the space to talk about the evolution of their relationship, they will provide a more complex, nuanced story. Moreover, by emphasizing process (evolution) as in Question 3b, participants are more likely to make connections between experiences over time, as "markers" or "signs," or as part of a "process" of deterioration and/or growing friendship (among many other possibilities).

Question 4a: How do participants' describe their identities as stay-at-home mothers?

Question 4b: How have participants' identities as mothers transformed throughout their marriage and divorce?

Question 4a is ineffective because answers may only refer to one time period in which the participants were stay-at-home mothers. Moreover, they may not discuss this issue directly, in a way that can later be analyzed and linked back to the research question. Question 4b allows for a multiplicity of data to emerge. Question 4b also acknowledges that identity is not fixed, as implied in Question 4a, but changes over time. This is arguably an important part of this study.

Once you've determined what you're studying, you need to figure out who you will be interviewing. The development of a research purpose statement and guiding research questions will lead you to the appropriate population. In the preceding example, divorced women who are, or were, stay-at-home mothers would be identified as the target population. Next you need to figure out how you will recruit participants, and how many participants you intend to interview. There are two major issues to consider as you determine your sample size: (1) serving the research purpose and (2) practicality.

With respect to serving your research purpose, consider the following questions:

- How do you intend to use your data or transfer the findings from one context/group to another?
  - Do you intend to make generalizations based on your data?
  - Do you intend to build theory out of your data, or support an existing theory?
- How do you plan to balance breadth and depth?

- How have you framed your guiding research questions, and who can help you best answer them?
- What format do you plan to use to represent your data (article, book, essay, arts-based piece, transcript only)?
- How important is diversity (race, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, age)? What kind of sample allows for a thorough/comprehensive study of the topic?

Of course, you may not be able to answer all of these questions until you have collected and analyzed your data, but consider them as more or less likely outcomes. Practical issues to consider include time, money, and access to appropriate participants. Oral history is very time consuming. During data collection, each participant is typically interviewed in multiple sessions, with each session lasting 60–90 minutes. In projects involving only one participant, sometimes many interview sessions are held over an expanse of time. Transcription is a very time-intensive activity, followed by data analysis, which is also very time intensive due to the high volume of qualitative data. A researcher has to consider how much time he/she is able to devote to the study. Practically speaking, one must also consider funding. What, if any, costs are associated with the study (such as paying a transcriber, paying for research assistance, recording equipment, paying participants honorariums and/or travel expenses, lost wages, travel, software)? Many oral history projects don't involve any costs beyond the researcher's time and a few tape cassettes (which can ultimately be reused). The longer a study lasts, the greater the expenses are likely to be. Finally, in terms of selecting appropriate participants, some research topics open themselves up to large pools of possible participants (because many people experienced the event, or have direct experience with the topic). However, other topics greatly limit the number of possible participants, and thus may determine the ultimate number of willing and able participants. For example, in a project about people working in a specific local business, or people who experienced a small or midsized local event (such as a fire), there may be a smaller pool of potential participants. In this regard, the research topic itself may determine your sample size, or at least your options.

Recruitment can occur in numerous ways. If there is a target population you are interested in—for example, people who

experienced a particular event—you might use public records to identify those people and send them an initial contact letter or email, or you can call them. Generally, a letter prior to a phone call is recommended, so that people are not put on the spot. A letter also allows you an opportunity to provide some introductory information about the study. Whether you're interested in a particular event or broader topical area, personal and professional networks are frequently used to locate potential participants. Often "snowball sampling" occurs, and each participant may lead the researcher to other potential participants. This is often true in oral history, because the topics covered include locating members of disenfranchised groups who may not be easily located, people who have experienced something sensitive or private (i.e., sexual assault), or people with concealable identities (i.e., homosexuals). Sometimes the whole sample is recruited prior to data collection. In other instances, for example when grounded theory[1] is employed, some participants are selected and, after they are interviewed, additional participants are selected and interviewed (this process may continue to be repeated). In these instances, what is learned from one participant or group of participants is used to help select other participants (and guide their interviews). The process generally ends when researchers feel they have reached the "data saturation" point, and will not significantly contribute to their learning by collecting more data.

Here are two examples of prospective initial contact letters.

Example 1

Dear Jane Smith,

I am writing to you because I am conducting an oral history study about the experience of divorce for stay-at-home mothers. It is my hope that this research will help others understand these experiences more. I hope that you will consider participating.

I can be reached at (phone) or (email) to answer any questions you may have. I will follow up to see if you are interested. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Patricia Leavy, Ph.D.

There are several problems with the preceding letter. First, the prospective participant is not being told what their participation in the study means. Many people do not know what the term "oral history" means. Participants are not being told about the time commitment or location of the interviews. Second, there is no mention of ethical issues, such as confidentiality and the voluntary nature of the study. Third, the participant is not given any information about the researcher and her qualifications (other than having a PhD), or her interest in the topic. Fourth, the participant is not told anything about how or why she was sought out, which could make the person feel uneasy. Finally, there is no specific information about when or how the "follow-up" will occur.

Although contact letters should not be overwhelming, and later informed consent forms will elaborate on the nature and uses of the study, more information should be given than that presented in Example 1. The following example provides a more detailed letter.

Example 2

Dear Jane Smith,

My name is Patricia Leavy, and I am a sociology professor at Stonehill College, where I have taught for 7 years. I am writing to you because I am conducting an oral history interview study about the experience of divorce for stay-at-home mothers. Through my recruitment process, your name was mentioned as someone who might be interested in participating.

Should you choose to participate, your participation is completely voluntary and you are free to change your mind and stop your participation at any time. Your identity will be kept strictly confidential. It is my hope to publish this study as an academic journal article; however, I will not use your name or any other identifying information.

Your participation would mean that I would set up 2 or 3 interview sessions with you, lasting 60–90 minutes each. I would work around your schedule. The interviews could be held in my office, your home, or another quiet location of your choosing. I will provide light refreshments and reimburse you for any travel expenses.

I am very interested in the issues women face regarding marriage, parenting, and work. I think you have valuable knowledge to share that could benefit others. It is my hope that the interview experience would be personally rewarding for you, as well.

I can be reached at (phone) or (email) to answer any questions you may have. I will follow up in 1–2 weeks with a phone call to see if you're interested in learning more (unless, of course, I hear from you first). Thank you.

Sincerely,
Patricia Leavy, Ph.D.

As you can see, Example 2 addresses all of the weaknesses present in the first letter. Although lengthier, the letter is still brief enough that one can expect people to read it, if they are so inclined. Some researchers opt for a shorter initial contact letter; however, I suggest one that addresses, at least briefly, the issues noted. Try to limit the letter to one typed page. The letter also presents a good jumping-off point if the recipient is interested in participating. All contact with the participant is a part of building rapport, which is vital for data collection. This entire process, beginning with topic selection, should be documented.

Data Collection

Once you have your participant(s) or your initial participant(s), it is time to set up the interviews. At this point you must obtain informed consent. (Check the IRB guidelines at your institution.) Informed consent forms should include clear, accessible, and straightforward language. They should be open, honest, and forthcoming about the nature of the study, intended uses of the study, and possible risks involved with participation. However, the informed consent form should not be so revealing as to bias participants (sway what they tell you). In this vein you must consider carefully how you state your research purpose. Generally, informed consent forms should include the following (each as applicable):

Title of the Project
Principal Investigator (with contact info.)

Research Team (with contact info.)
Introduction or Background Information
Research Purpose
Research Methods/Procedures
Duration of Study (Optional)
Possible Risks of Participation
Possible Benefits of Participation (Optional)
Compensation (even if there is none, this should be stated)
Confidentiality
Voluntary Participation (right to withdraw)
Questions (participants' rights to ask questions)
Signatures with Dates (Principal Investigator and Participant)

Most academic institutions can provide you with informed consent guidelines and samples. Discipline-specific examples are also readily available online.

Once participants have consented to participate, it is important to work on setting up expectations and building rapport. Setting up expectations becomes particularly relevant to later interpretation of the data, and how data are represented and evaluated (discussed in Chapters 3–5). As data are generated in a collaborative context, issues of "authority" over the narrative to emerge from the data can be confusing. Therefore, it is important to come to an understanding about each person's role in the process. To do this, consider the following:

- Will the participant have an opportunity to review their interview transcript(s) and make corrections? (This is a common practice.)
- Will the participant have an opportunity to change prior statements, or add information to further explain or clarify prior statements?
- Will the participant participate in the interpretation of the interview data?
  - If they do participate in the interpretation phase, then how will any interpretative disagreements be resolved? What will be represented in the final write-up?
- Will only the researcher have the right to publish material from the oral history project, or will the participant also have the right to publish it? (Typically, the researcher retains this right, at least informally).

Setting up appropriate expectations goes a long way towards preventing possible conflicts later, during interpretation and representation. This is also a part of ethical practice—the researcher needs to take every reasonable precaution to avoid the participant feeling that they were misled or taken advantage of in any way. Ill-defined expectations can lead to a host of problems.

Borland's (1991) classic example of interpretive conflict in oral history research highlights the tensions that can arise when interpretive roles are not clearly defined. Borland conducted oral history research with her grandmother, Beatrice. During data interpretation, Borland shared her interpretations with Beatrice. Borland had interpreted an event in Beatrice's life as exhibiting "feminism;" however, Beatrice disputed being labeled in this way. She insisted, "That's not what I said!" Through reflection, Borland came to realize that she was using contemporary academic frames to make sense of Beatrice's experiences; however, these were frames that Beatrice did not share. This is a very common experience in oral history interpretation and writing, discussed further in Chapters 3 and 4. These kinds of issues, which are really about authority over interpretation, can be mitigated by having these discussions early on, prior to any data collection.

Another less common kind of example comes from Sitzia (2003). She had serious conflicts with her oral history participant as they attempted to share authority while producing his autobiography over a 6–year period. Sitzia writes:

> as . . . we drew closer to the publication of a book, Arthur began behaving aggressively; putting substantial pressure on me to work more quickly, threatening to complete the work with another editor, and most importantly, raising issues of ownership: "our" book became only "Arthur's" book. This situation was made worse by the fact that Arthur was going through a severe emotional and mental health crisis . . . I felt—and still do feel—a huge responsibility for Arthur and felt I should help him resolve his crisis, but did not feel equipped to do this. On reflection, these complications partly arose because of the experimental nature of the project: neither I nor Arthur had worked in such a collaborative way before. My approach to the project was an informal learning

> experience . . . I now believe that it is crucial to define clear boundaries and guidelines when embarking on a project of this nature. (p.97)

These conflicts were no doubt exacerbated by the lengthy nature of Sitzia's work with her participant, but such dangers can arise when clear expectations are not agreed upon.

The process of setting up expectations is also connected to the ongoing process of rapport-building, which is integral to successful oral history practice. I suggest that the central role of rapport-building differentiates data collection in oral history from all other interview methods (in which rapport may be helpful, but less central to successful data collection). When the researcher and participant build rapport via nonverbal gestures (eye contact, head nodding), acclimating to narrative styles, and developing trust, then the participant is likely to speak more freely and at greater depth. I elaborate on this shortly, when reviewing the interview process itself; however, at this point it is important to note that rapport-building can occur during all points of contact with participants, including pre-interview communication.

Some researchers schedule preliminary sessions in order to set up expectations and begin the process of building rapport. Minister (1991) writes:

> Taking time to know another means more than a preliminary interview; it entails meeting for an extended session or more. Congruent with good oral history practice, researchers take the opportunity to solicit narrators' comments and suggestions about the project . . . the purpose of the initial contact is not just a preliminary interview to obtain data; the meeting is an opportunity to promote collegiality and to engage in mutual self-disclosure. (p. 36)

Building rapport necessitates becoming familiar with each participant's narrative style (four of which were reviewed in Chapter 1), and starting this process early can go a long way toward facilitating successful data collection.

Some researchers practicing oral history find that a preliminary interview session can be much more than an opportunity for reviewing procedural issues and the like, but is a time in which

rapport-building, relationship-building, and intimate sharing can begin. Pre-interviews can open up a space for the reciprocal building of trust. In the following piece, Tori Lockler, Ellen Klein and Carolyn Ellis share a dialogue about their experiences with pre-interviews in a Holocaust oral history project.

Box 2.1

Relational Bonding under the Sukkah and in Oral History Pre-Interviews

By Tori Lockler, Ellen Klein, and Carolyn Ellis

"When you conduct a Holocaust interview, do you ever feel like a guest witnessing an intimate story being told, and wonder if you really should be hearing what you are hearing?" Carolyn asks Tori and Ellen, two graduate students who have been working with her for several months in an oral history study of survivors of the Holocaust. It seems appropriate to be holding this discussion at Ellen's house, beneath the hundreds of white lights illuminating the sukkah, a temporary booth that Ellen's husband, Avi, has built for the weeklong Jewish festival of Sukkoth. Carolyn admires the trees swaying overhead, providing a breeze on an otherwise hot Florida evening. All three feel stuffed from the delicious salmon meal they have just eaten, and contented as they drink coffee and eat the chocolate ganaché cake that Ellen has baked for this occasion. They are glad to have this relaxed time to talk outside the university, where they always seem to be moving at a breakneck pace. Multitasking as she races down the hall, a stack of papers threatening to fall from her hands, Carolyn usually is rushing to one or another meeting. Adding motherhood to their roles as students and teachers, Tori and Ellen usually look the same, but with the addition of a cell phone attached to their ears as they coordinate picking up children from school and figuring out who is taking whom to which doctor's appointment. Most likely, all are late for some deadline, which plays like a recorded message in their heads as they nod to other students and professors hurrying by.

"I think the key," says Ellen, "is to have built a relationship before the actual videotaped interview. Then you can become an engaged participant in the survivor's story, rather than a voyeur who is there simply observing and asking questions, trying to get the story."

"The opportunity to build that relationship comes in the pre-interview session," Carolyn says, "when you meet the survivor prior to the actual recorded interview."

"I agree. I'm always glad to have that private time without the camera technicians, the equipment, and the knowledge that what is said will be broadcast to the public," says Tori.

"I also prefer sharing a meal with the survivor before the interview, but that doesn't always happen," Carolyn says.

"I agree. I always bring food," says Ellen, and Tori nods.

"The interview guidelines from both Shoah and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum describe the pre-interview primarily as a time to gather facts, dates, and spellings of names and places," says Tori (USHMM, 2007, viii). "The guidelines direct us to gather information during the pre-interview that can help us with our research about places and events, and prepare us for the recorded interview."

"The guidelines don't mention food!" laughs Ellen.

"No they don't, not for the pre-interview or the interview," adds Tori, as she oohs and aahs over the same chocolate cake Carolyn is eating.

"Little or no emphasis is put on this meeting as a time to build relationships," says Ellen, "other than producing something akin to an Aristotelian view of a specific kind of relationship based on a certain good that can be obtained. The process is presented as a means to an end . . . to get the story."

"Yet, all three of us have talked about how often the pre-interview has provided a time when we have gotten to know the survivor," Carolyn says, "which helps us know how and what to ask them during the recorded session."

"And a time for the survivor to get to know us," says Tori.

"Which is crucial to building a relationship," adds Ellen.

"In one pre-interview I talked about my dissertation on the 'Left Behind' series and the Christian rapture, which led to a conversation about events occurring in Israel," says Tori. "I think the survivor and I connected through that conversation. It was important that the survivor knew what I was interested in."

"One of my interviewees asked me up front in the pre-interview if I was Jewish," Carolyn says.

"We get that all the time," Tori and Ellen say together, laughing at how they have come to finish each other's sentences.

"I knew then that this was something very much on her mind, and a discussion we needed to have if I wanted her to trust me to hear her story," Carolyn adds.

"I'm curious. What did you tell her?" asks Ellen, who is Jewish.

"I told her that I had had two Jewish husbands and two Jewish mothers-in-law," Carolyn laughs. "That got her attention."

"I'll bet," says Ellen.

"Then I explained my interests and work in trauma and grief, and how I identified with the Jewish community, how I felt Jewish really."

"How'd she respond?" asks Tori.

"She gave me a piece of Beigli, a traditional Hungarian pastry she had specially ordered. A Beigli is a poppy seed roll that is often prepared for the holidays, she told me. I knew then we were going to be okay."

"One of the survivors I interviewed baked me a cake," says Ellen. "It was a token of our newfound connection. But before that, in the pre-interview she wanted to know if I was Jewish, where I go to synagogue, and whether I was married or had children. She relaxed after I answered her questions."

"Sometimes survivors have started telling me their story in the pre-interview as well," says Tori.

"What do you do then?" Carolyn asks.

"I usually don't stop them. I remember one survivor who seemed to need to tell her story right then. I was engaged in the story and felt called to listen at that moment, even if it meant she'd have to tell the story again in the videotaped interview."

"Sometimes survivors tell us things in private in the pre-interview that they are unwilling to tell to the public in the recorded session," says Ellen. "That happened to me with one of the survivors I interviewed. As our relationship developed during the pre-interview, she shared some private thoughts and feelings. She cried and I cried. She could see I was connecting with her emotionally, which is harder to have happen when we're in the recorded session."

"Guidelines caution interviewers about reacting emotionally to the interviewees, but I think that's a mistake. A significant way we make connections is through emotionality," says Tori (USHMM, 2007, p. 15).

"The pre-interview though felt like it was private between me and the survivor. She understood then that I cared about her as a person, not just about getting her story," says Ellen.

"And I think that kind of experience makes the survivor more comfortable to share experiences deeply during the recorded interview," says Tori.

". . .and opens them up to other memories as well," says Ellen.

"That's been my experience," says Tori, and Ellen agrees.

"The pre-interview has been the neglected part of the oral history interview," Carolyn says. "I think we definitely have to think more about pre-interviews—their purpose, how we want to conduct them, what we want to get out of them. Just thinking of that meeting as a time to check names and spelling seems a waste of a time that can hold so much relationally."

Carolyn, Ellen, and Tori sit silently, each aware of the relationships the three of them are building—not just to get degrees, perform job responsibilities, or complete this project on stories of Holocaust survivors, as important as that is to all of them. As with the survivors, they too are coming to see their relationships with each other as an end in itself. No doubt having that relational bond will make all their joint goals more obtainable, the process of getting there more enjoyable, and the end result more fulfilling.

"More cake?" asks Ellen into the silence. Tori and Carolyn both nod, then run their fingers over the remainder of the chocolate icing on their plates and hold the sparkling clean plates out to Ellen.

In addition to showing the important dimensions of pre-interviews, the preceding piece offers a wonderful window into the writing process in oral history. In talking about the value and challenges of pre-interviews, the writers also demonstrate how, stylistically, to invite readers into an oral history project by setting a scene, disclosing their own position in the process, and creating a story.

Data Collection

Interviews should be conducted in a quiet, private environment in which the participant feels comfortable (typically the participant's home or researcher's office). An advantage of conducting the interview in the participant's home, in addition to situating the interview on "their turf," is that you may have the ability to develop ethnographic observations (please note that you will need to develop an ethical way to do this, and I suggest consulting with your participants if you wish to collect ethnographic data). The participant may share photographs, documents, or other objects as a part of their storytelling process. These items may also serve as important data. It is necessary to have an organizational system to keep track of these items. The method for doing this will vary based on which of the following situations occurs:

- You observe the artifact only (usually in the participant's home).
- You observe the artifact and discuss it with your participant (or the participant purposefully shows you the artifact and you discuss it with him or her).
- In addition to observation and discussion, you were able to take a photograph of the item (made easier and more common with the advent of digital cameras and camera phones).
- In addition to observation and discussion, you are able to copy photographs and/or documents for your use.
- In addition to observation and discussion, you were able to borrow the item temporarily.

Depending on which of these situations occurs, you may make ethnographic memo notes at the time, or you may write your

memo notes privately after the interview. Memo notes may contain a description of the item, notation regarding to whom the item belongs and its location, your impressions about the item and its relevance to your project, your questions about the item, and any comments the participant made about the item (how they got it, why it is important to them, what it means to them, etc.). When photographs are available, these should be catalogued as well. Of course, when items are loaned to you great care must be taken regarding their safety. Some researchers use an index card system for their memos; however, I suggest keeping electronic memos (and typing any handwritten notes as quickly after the meeting as possible). Not only is it easier to create backups for electronic files, it greatly simplifies whatever organizational structure you choose (cataloguing alphabetically, by subject, by type of memo, etc.). Moreover, electronic notes are much easier to merge later with your transcripts and other memo notes. This greatly aids the data analysis and interpretation process.

The heart of data collection is the interview process itself, which may include anywhere from one or more interview sessions. Social science projects typically involve two to three sessions with each participant; however, it really is difficult to generalize.

Often, researchers will construct an interview guide to assist them. In oral history, when interview guides are used they are generally organized chronologically or topically, depending on the nature of the study. Because oral history seeks extensive responses from participants—ideally, pages at a time of uninterrupted narration—oral history interview guides are very broad, serving as a prompt if the researcher needs it (and not a structured guide or specific set of questions). Most researchers tape-record interview sessions (with the participant's permission). Some researchers videotape interviews, and include an analysis of nonverbal gesturing and the like (although this is less common). The decision whether or not to also take notes during the interview is very personal, and intimately linked to one's strategy for building rapport. The most important thing researchers can do during interview sessions is to show unwavering and sincere interest. This is accomplished via verbal cues such as "go on," "please tell me more," "uh-huh," and so on, as well as picking up on "markers" and asking the participant to return to them. Nonverbal cues such as eye contact,

head nodding, alert posture, appropriate facial expressions, and so on, also help. In short, a researcher's demeanor communicates volumes to participants and ideally fosters their narrative process. Therefore, the choice whether or not to take notes is largely linked to whether or not it facilitates the researcher's ability to *pay attention* and act supportively. I recommend having a small, unobtrusive notepad for jotting down occasional "markers" that you may otherwise forget, but not to get distracted with extensive note-taking (markers are discussed shortly). More detailed notes can and should be taken privately, after the interview session.

During data collection, the researcher's primary role is as listener. This means full, active listening, including the display of appropriate visual and verbal signs of listening (noted earlier). For example, researchers want to listen for "markers" (Weiss, 1993). These are tidbits of information dropped in the process of talking about something else. These moments can alert the researcher to something important that might not otherwise be tapped. It is important, however, not to interrupt the flow of conversation, so the researcher should make a mental or written note of the marker and return to it later, when there is a natural break in the conversation. I recommend using a small notebook to jot down markers, as they can be easily forgotten. Here is an example. During the course of talking about her wedding a participant says the following:

> "People were dancing all night. It was a real party, and the band was so fantastic that everyone really lost track of time. They were from New York, and they came in just for the wedding and they were really, really great. They played a lot of Motown and that sort of thing. It was exactly what I was hoping for, just great music and a lot of fun, even though it was different than what I had imagined as a little girl, it was really a fantastic night. By the middle of the night I had to take my shoes off and leave them at the table because my feet hurt so badly from dancing so much."

In the preceding excerpt we can see an example of a marker. In the course of talking about how much fun her wedding was, and in particular, talking about the music and dancing, the participant noted a disjuncture between her wedding and what she had envisioned as a little girl. This may be an important source

of data. The participant should not be interrupted while she is recounting memories of her wedding; however, when there is a break in the conversation the researcher should go back and say something like the following: "Earlier, when talking about your wedding, you mentioned that it was different than you had envisioned as a girl, can you tell me about that?" It is possible that this will open up an entirely new line of storytelling. Perhaps there are shades of disappointment for the participant with respect to her wedding. Or, perhaps she had a fantasy as a child about her wedding that shaped her later dating or marital experiences. These are just two examples of the kind of data that might emerge when the researcher returns to the marker dropped by the participant. Often in oral history research, markers can lead to important data, and later to key insights that would not otherwise have emerged.

There are several other kinds of statements that oral historians listen for, in addition to markers. In their pivotal work on oral history Anderson and Jack (1991) suggests three kinds of statements researchers should listen for (bear in mind that listening in oral history extends after the interview sessions into analysis, so this is also relevant when using preexisting oral histories).

First, researchers may want to listen to a participant's *moral language* (p. 19). These are often self-evaluative statements and may provide information about the participant's self-identity. Moral language also indicates how a participant uses social values and the like, as a part of their evaluation of self and others. This is an important data source in oral history practice in the social sciences, because the researcher seeks to make connections between individual participants and the larger culture. So, for example, in an oral history interview about the experience of divorce, a female participant said, "I felt like such a failure; I felt ashamed telling my family." Or, she said, "I wanted to give my kids the perfect family." Both statements contain moral or self-evaluative language. What is analytically interesting for the oral historian is the suggestion of cultural constructs guiding how the participant has experienced the dissolution of her marriage. Shame, failure, and an idealized nuclear family are all social constructs. The participant is using cultural frames, and her perceptions of cultural values, to make sense out of her experience.

Second, researchers may listen for *meta-statements* (Anderson & Jack, 1991, p. 21). Meta-statements occur when a participant stops speaking in order to cycle back and explain or alter a statement they have made. This typically occurs for one of two reasons. In some instances, the process of saying something out loud causes them to rethink or reflect on what they've said. Meta-statements can therefore alert researchers to moments of self-realization (a possible and unique benefit that oral history can have for participants). In other instances, meta-statements occur because the participant is concerned with how the content of what they said may be perceived. A participant may, for example, become uncomfortable because they think they have said something politically incorrect. For example, if a participant says something about gender, they may double back to clarify their statement so they do not appear sexist. These statements, therefore, indicate a participant's perception of, and relationship to, various social norms and values.

Finally, Anderson and Jack (1991) suggest researchers listen to the *logic of the narrative* (p. 22). As you listen to the participants speak, and later as you listen to the interview tapes and review the transcript, make note of contradictions. Also, consider if the narrative makes sense to you. Are there parts that don't make sense or do not resonate as authentic?

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Once you have completed your interviews, it is time for data analysis. It is important to note that in many oral history projects in the social sciences, data collection and data analysis occur simultaneously as an iterative process. This means that researchers often engage in a cycle of data collection and data analysis, sometimes referred to as *grounded theory*. So, for example, a researcher will collect a small sample of oral history interviews, transcribe and code those interviews, and then, based on early analytical findings, conduct additional oral history interviews. The researcher may repeat this process until they have reached the data saturation point. This means that the collection of additional data does not further serve the research purpose. For the sake of simplicity, I have separated my discussion of data collection and data analysis; however, they need not occur in a linear fashion.

Transcription

The first step toward being able to use your interview data is to transcribe the interviews. Transcription is a time consuming but vital part of the oral history process. (Note: if you are using preexisting interviews, skip ahead to the next section.) Transcription is the process of taking your audiotapes and creating a written account of the interview. Most researchers who use oral history produce, at least initially, a verbatim transcript of each interview session. It is possible to skip this step, and only transcribe what you think the important parts of the interview are. However, if you do this, you run the risk of missing important data. The insights gleaned from oral history interviews are generally cumulative, and come from immersing oneself in the data (Anderson & Jack, 1991; Shopes, 2002). Therefore, both the process of transcription and the later analysis of the transcribed interviews lead to the interpretation of the data. I proceed forward under the assumption that you are fully transcribing your interviews, or working with complete transcripts. If this is not the case, you can skip ahead accordingly.

When you transcribe your interviews you will need to make a decision about whether or not to include everything. For example, when people speak they often have false starts, uhms, you knows, and other informal, grammatically incorrect manners of speaking. You must decide whether or not to include these in the transcription. I recommend including all of these expressions at the start, for a full and accurate accounting of the interview. These can be omitted later; however, it is much more difficult to add them in. When you transcribe your interviews you will also need to make a decision about whether or not to include memo notes as you transcribe. Typically, at this stage if you do include memo notes they center on the participant's narrative style and emotionality. For example, you may have a way of documenting or "coding" pauses, the elongation of words or sounds, raising or lowering one's voice, laughter, crying, and other forms of expression.

For the remainder of this book, as my primary illustrative example I use an oral history project I conducted with a female college student about her eating disorder, The participant was interviewed in two 90-minute interview sessions, as well as pre- and post-meetings. The interviews spanned her childhood through the time

of the interviews, during which she was still struggling with a several-year battle with anorexia nervosa that had seriously impaired her health. I came into the project interested in understanding the sociocultural and other factors that influence the development and experience of eating disorders in college-age women. The participant has been given the pseudonym Claire.

Body Image Oral History Transcript: Claire

The following excerpt is an example of a verbatim transcription with researcher memo notes regarding storytelling characteristics, such as tone, pauses, and the like, included directly in the transcript. An alternative way of accomplishing this would be to use a 2-column method with transcript on the left side and researcher memo notes on the right side. Another alternative would be to put the memo notes in the margins of the hardcopy transcript (in addition to doing this by hand, there are now tools whereby this can be done via PDF files). I have selected the following transcript excerpt for two reasons. First, it will be useful for illustrating the difference between verbatim transcripts and edited transcripts. Second, it is an excellent example of the kind of data that can be generated via oral history interview. In this example, Claire was asked if she had to change schools when her family moved. She had already spoken about how her family moved several times during her childhood. Each time she discussed her move, she also discussed the impact it had on her school and friends. You will see in the following excerpt that, although Claire was asked about changing schools, the open-ended narrative approach of oral history elicited vital data about Claire's relationship with her parents, particularly her father. From this data I was able to gain important insights into the process by which Claire became a "perfectionist," as well as the importance she placed on the approval of others. These interlocking factors are central to the later development of her eating disorder, as was revealed during data analysis and interpretation.

In the following excerpts the researcher's voice appears in bold italics (during transcription it is important to utilize a consistent method of distinguishing the researcher's voice from the participant's voice; often bold and/or italicized fonts are used.)

Excerpt

I wasn't on a bus route anymore so my dad used to have to bring me to school and back from school. Um, which was really hard because before it was like really cool when that happened because it was a once in a while thing, um, but my dad was not all that reliable. I mean his job was definitely "A" number one priority you know so like he would be late picking me up and I would sit on the steps after school for like an hour (emphasizes "for like an hour") or two hours.

What was that like?

It sucked. I remember it being like (laughs)

Laughter

Excuse my language again

No, please . . .

but it was really bad. Um, you know and I can remember I remember sitting there and like (voice becomes very soft) waiting and waiting and waiting (voice now louder) and like half my brain would be like you know maybe he forgot and you should really go and call and the other half would be like I don't want to bother him and like it's such a nuisance and I'm sure he'll remember and you know. And so, like it was really hard. Especially cuz I loved, and I still do, I love my dad so much and there were so many good things you know that I remember like, I still remember when he would take me to school we would always stop at this (laughs) he never had time to make me lunches in the morning or things like that so if I didn't want to have hot lunch we would stop at this little country store and they had the best (emphasizes best) turkey sandwiches, on these really fresh Kaiser rolls I don't know why I remember this.

Laughter

And I just thought it was so cool cuz I had this like grown up lunch to bring to school, and um, he would like you know stop at the store with me (voice now so soft that I am missing a few

words in the transcription) and I just thought that was great. So, but, it was really hard because I knew, like that year I sensed that I couldn't (voice softens) depend on him. Like I never knew when he was gonna be there or if he was gonna be there you know. And I always felt stupid when I told people after school that like oh my dad's picking me up you know and then like if they would come back for sports or whatever and I was still there and they'd be like where's your dad I'd be like, on his way you know I mean it's just it's really hard.

Did it change your relationship with him?

I never, I never let on I don't think how hard it was, like my mom was the one who was the most pissed off. You know she'd be like, but she really didn't like do anything. My mom was always very (exaggerates very) quiet around my dad. Um, you know they had been high school sweethearts, um, they were the only, had only dated each other sort of thing. Um, and my mom (pause) was always kind of the nurturer the taker you know she took care of everyone. She was you know definitely if you look at the the fight or flight instinct it was definitely flight. Like she was so non-confrontational like you didn't argue in our house. You know you didn't like fight you didn't like criticize people you know. Um.

Was that hard?

I guess it was harder as I grew up. You know because I really didn't know how to deal with conflict and things. And I think it was hard when she wouldn't take like take my side kind of thing. You know like she wouldn't yell at my dad about it or anything like that and so I was just kind of like you know all right you know.

Do you think that's one of the reasons you were so quiet with your dad when those things happened?

Oh definitely. My mom and I are a lot alike and I think I learned a lot of my behaviors from her. Um, where you know you kind of forgive very easily and it's ok and you know things that you would never dream of doing to someone else are ok if

they happen to you you know sort of thing. And so, I guess I just learned at a very young age one because of my age and two because of my role models not to cause problems, and not to, you know I was definitely the peace keeper in my family, like I didn't want to be a nuisance you know like I didn't want that kind of attention, like if I was gonna get attention it was gonna be because of something I did that was great, you know.

Do you think that's why you work so hard in school also?

Oh definitely. I mean definitely. I used to love (exaggerates love) I mean I still do, like the first thing I do when I get my grades is I talk to my parents.

Laughter. Me too.

You know I mean I still like I really need that.

I call my dad at his office to tell him.

Totally. Totally. I mean and that kind of had (pause) not really a down side like I always pushed myself harder then anyone else pushed me, like I remember when I was in fifth grade my school had this special like gifted program even above and beyond the ones that they already had like for the class room setting and it was an after school program. It was called Pro. And you got to go and do all these really neat like brain teaser puzzles and stuff like that. Um, and of course like all of my friends did it you know like cuz we were in that group, and um, so like I really wanted to do it and I I did it and my mom freaked out and thought it was gonna push me too hard. So she took me out of the program. And I was so mad I put myself back in and didn't tell her (laugh) I was just like, I don't want to be away from my friends you know. Um, so, you know but on the other hand like I can remember calling my dad when I was in like eighth grade work and I got like a B+ in like calculus or something, I mean I don't even remember what it was. I remember being so (exaggerates so) bummed out and like you know I was so scared to tell him and everything and he was like well you know you'll just work harder next you know gives you something to

shoot for, or whatever, but to me it was just like, such, that was, I couldn't believe it you know, what what I had missed. It wasn't that I got a B+ like that was good like you know it was like I could have gotten an A I should have worked harder I could have done more like you know? Um, so I was always kind of like that. I was like that in everything though like I was really (long pause) active. Um, when I was in (pause) fifth grade they also started you with like instruments, musical lessons and stuff. So I was in chorus. Like I was always really in in choir and in singing in band actually. I played the clarinet. I played the flute. And I used to love it because um we'd have these concerts, like Christmas concerts and everything. And, you know (laugh) I think about it now and I just laugh because I couldn't even imagine being in the same gym with like an elementary school band right now you know. But my parents always treated it like it was the symphony. You know they'd get dressed up

Laughter

We would go and get ice cream afterwards and like, it was just

That must have been fun.

Oh, it was awesome. It was really really awesome. Um.

The following is an edited or "beautified" version of the same interview transcript. I have also omitted all of the memo notes except for denoting laughter (in order to contextualize my own laughter). You will notice the radical difference that cleaning up the transcript in this way has; however, it is important to be weary of the impact you are having on meaning. While edited transcripts might present the participant in "the best light" they also have the potential to dehumanize participants. Moreover, edited transcripts can alter perceptions of the race, class, age, education, ethnicity, geography, and so on. Therefore decisions about editing transcripts are linked to power, authority, and meaning-making in the oral history process.

✍ Edited Excerpt

I wasn't on a bus route anymore so my dad used to have to bring me to school and back from school which was really hard because before it was really cool when that happened because it was a once in a while thing, but my dad was not all that reliable. I mean his job was definitely "A" number one priority so he would be late picking me up and I would sit on the steps after school for an hour or two hours.

What was that like?

It sucked. I remember it being like (laughs)

Laughter

Excuse my language again

No, please . . .

but it was really bad. I remember sitting there and) waiting and waiting and waiting and half my brain would be like maybe he forgot and you should really go and call and the other half would be like I don't want to bother him and it's such a nuisance and I'm sure he'll remember. And so, it was really hard. Especially because I loved, and I still do, I love my dad so much and there were so many good things that I remember. I still remember when he would take me to school we would always stop at this (laughs) he never had time to make me lunches in the morning or things like that so if I didn't want to have hot lunch we would stop at this little country store and they had the best turkey sandwiches, on these really fresh Kaiser rolls I don't know why I remember this.

Laughter

And I just thought it was so cool because I had this grown up lunch to bring to school, and, he would stop at the store with me . . . and I just thought that was great. But, it was really hard because I knew, like that year I sensed that I couldn't depend on him. I never knew when he was going to be there or if he was going to be there. And I always felt stupid when I told people after school that my dad's picking me up and then if they would come back for sports or whatever and I was still there and they'd

be like where's your dad I'd be like, on his way. I mean it's just really hard.

Did it change your relationship with him?

I never let on I don't think how hard it was. My mom was the one who was the most pissed off. But she really didn't do anything. My mom was always very quiet around my dad. They had been high school sweethearts; they had only dated each other sort of thing. And my mom was always kind of the nurturer, she took care of everyone. She was definitely, if you look at the fight or flight instinct, it was definitely flight. She was so non-confrontational you didn't argue in our house. You didn't fight, you didn't like criticize people.

Was that hard?

I guess it was harder as I grew up because I really didn't know how to deal with conflict and things. And I think it was hard when she wouldn't take my side kind of thing. Like she wouldn't yell at my dad about it or anything like that and so I was just kind of like all right.

Do you think that's one of the reasons you were so quiet with your dad when those things happened?

Oh definitely. My mom and I are a lot alike and I think I learned a lot of my behaviors from her. Where you kind of forgive very easily and it's ok and you know things that you would never dream of doing to someone else are ok if they happen to you. And so, I guess I just learned at a very young age, one because of my age, and two because of my role models not to cause problems. I was definitely the peace keeper in my family. I didn't want to be a nuisance you know like I didn't want that kind of attention. If I was going to get attention it was going to be because of something I did that was great.

Do you think that's why you work so hard in school also?

Oh definitely. I mean definitely. I still do, the first thing I do when I get my grades is I talk to my parents.

Laughter. Me too.

I mean I still I really need that.

I call my dad at his office to tell him.

Totally. I mean and that kind of had not really a down side, I always pushed myself harder then anyone else pushed me. I remember when I was in fifth grade my school had this special gifted program even above and beyond the ones that they already had for the class room setting and it was an after school program. It was called Pro. And you got to go and do all these really neat brain teaser puzzles and stuff like that. And of course all of my friends did it because we were in that group, and, so I really wanted to do it and I did it and my mom freaked out and thought it was going to push me too hard. So she took me out of the program. And I was so mad I put myself back in and didn't tell her (laugh) I was just like, I don't want to be away from my friends But on the other hand I can remember calling my dad when I was in eighth grade work and I got like a B+ in calculus or something, I mean I don't even remember what it was. I remember being so bummed out and I was so scared to tell him and everything and he was like well you know you'll just work harder next, gives you something to shoot for, or whatever, but to me I couldn't believe it, what I had missed. It wasn't that I got a B+ like that was good it was like I could have gotten an A I should have worked harder I could have done more. So I was always kind of that. I was like that in everything though. I was really active. When I was in fifth grade they also started you with instruments, musical lessons and stuff. So I was in chorus. I was always really in choir and in singing in band actually. I played the clarinet. I played the flute. And I used to love it because we'd have these concerts, Christmas concerts and everything. And, (laugh) I think about it now and I just laugh because I couldn't even imagine being in the same gym with an elementary school band right now you know. But my parents always treated it like it was the symphony. They'd get dressed up.

Laughter

We would go and get ice cream afterwards and, it was just . . .

That must have been fun.

Oh, it was awesome. It was really, really awesome.

Data Analysis: Coding and Memo Notes

Once the interviews have been transcribed, whether or not verbatim and whether or not memo notes have been included, it is now time to move towards data analysis. There are many different ways to proceed with data analysis, and there are excellent books available on the market that specifically focus on the process of analyzing qualitative data. Here, I offer a brief review of data analysis in order to better explicate the writing of research findings later. The suggestions offered in this section need not be taken as a linear or cookie-cutter model.

Analyzing oral history data generally requires three things. First, the researcher must immerse him- or herself in the data (Anderson & Jack, 1991; Shopes, 2002). This means reading the transcripts, sometimes repeatedly, and listening to the tapes if they are available. The insights gleaned from oral history interviews are cumulative, and can only emerge after this process of immersion. This stage in data analysis is an opportunity for the researcher to "get to know the data." During this stage, analytical ideas may begin to percolate as patterns, subtext, and other important elements of the data begin to come forward. It is important to jot down these ideas as they begin to emerge. Always document everything. During this early phase of data analysis, researchers may "mark up" the transcript (this may include jotting down ideas, circling keywords, underlining, and so forth).

The next steps toward data analysis are coding and memo writing. There are many different categories of memo notes, and many different ways of documenting your memo notes, as well as many different ways to code the data. Some researchers separate coding from memo writing, while others engage in cycles of coding and memo writing, with one informing the other. Following Saldaña (2009), I view coding and memo writing as concurrent analytic processes. He also suggests all memo notes are "analytical

memos" which can later be categorized and, influenced by his work, I concur.

The process of coding occurs as a step between collecting data and interpreting that data. This process reduces the data in terms of volume, highlights key elements of the data, and begins to make sense out of the data.

> A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and or evocative attribute for a portion of . . . data. (Saldaña, 2009, p. 3)

There are many qualitative software packages available if you are interested in computer-assisted data analysis. The programs are typically user-friendly and compatible with Word-created documents (i.e., your transcripts). These programs may be particularly appealing in projects where many oral histories have been collected and many transcripts need to be analyzed and compared. Generally, oral history researchers in the social sciences apply a grounded theory approach, or some version of it, to their data analysis. A grounded theory approach is an open approach to data analysis where codes are generated directly out of the data. Grounded theory approaches are useful for building theory out of your data, a common goal in oral history research in the social sciences.

> "Coding is a central part of a grounded theory approach and involves extracting meaning from non-numerical data such as text . . . if we were to describe how the coding process was actually done, for example . . . it would sound something like this: Coding usually consists of identifying "chunks" or "segments" in your textual data . . . and giving each of these a label (code)." (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2005, p. 349)

When analyzing oral history interviews, researchers often go through the following process:

Table 2.1
Typical Data Analysis Process in Oral History Research

Immersion into the Data	Coding/ Memo-Writing Cycles	Categories	Theory (Emergent or Supporting Existing)

Once you have developed your codes, which may be refined or elaborated through additional coding cycles and memo writing, you start to develop meta-code categories. Saldaña (2009) explains this process as: "a method that enables you to organize and group similarly coded data into categories or 'families' because they share some common characteristic—the beginning of a pattern" (p. 8).

The following is a segment of Claire's transcript, from earlier, with early line-by-line codes. This approach allowed me to assign a code to each line or chunk of data.

Table 2.2
Example of Initial Line-by-Line Coding

Transcript	**Initial Code**
And I just thought it was so cool because I had this grown-up lunch	Grown up/Cool
to bring to school, and, he would stop at the store with me . . .	Dad
and I just thought that was great. But, it	Time with dad great
was really hard because I knew, that year I sensed that I couldn't depend on him.	Dad not dependable
I never knew when he was going to be there or if he was going to be there.	Dad made feel insecure
And I always felt stupid when I told people after school that my dad's picking me up and then if they would come back for sports or whatever and I was still there	Embarrassed by dad
and they'd be like where's your dad I'd be like, on his way. I mean it's just really hard.	Hard time

I then grouped similar code categories together creating meta-code categories. So, for example, the initial codes "Dad not dependable;" "Dad made feel insecure;" "Embarrassed by dad;" and "Hard time" all became subsumed under the meta-code category "Disappointment" (which ultimately included additional codes as well).

Table 2.3
Example of Line-by-Line Coding to Categories

Transcript	**Initial Code**	**Category**
And I just thought it was so cool because I had this grown-up lunch to bring to school,	Grown up/Cool	Maturity
and, he would stop at the store with me . . .	Dad	
and I just thought that was great.	Time with Dad great	
But, it was really hard because I knew, that year I sensed that I couldn't depend on him.	Dad not dependable	Disappointment
I never knew when he was going to be there or if he was going to be there.	Dad made feel insecure	Disappointment
And I always felt stupid when I told people after school that my dad's picking me up and then if they would come back for sports or whatever and I was still there	Embarrassed by dad	Disappointment
and they'd be like where's your dad I'd be like, on his way. I mean it's just really hard.	Hard time	Disappointment

Here is another example: other initial line-by-line codes included: weight, the fear of gaining weight, desire for thinness, unhappiness with body, hair, appearance, and beauty. All of these early codes were then subsumed under the meta-code category "body image/appearance." After the process of coding Claire's

transcripts, the following meta-code categories were used (all of which emerged directly out of the data, inductively):

Claire's Meta-Code Categories

- Big Events/Markers
- Control
- Lack of Control
- Intelligence
- Maturity
- Independence
- Wanting Attention/Being Taken Care Of
- Disappointment
- Perfectionism
- Projection of Self
- Self-Reflection
- Body Image/Appearance
- Impact of Divorce

At this point I had reduced over 100 pages of transcripts down to approximately 25 coded pages. Under each meta-code category (above) were chunks of data (and their location in the original transcripts). The following example taken from Claire's coded data illustrates the data that was placed under the code category "perfectionism:"

Box 2.2
Perfectionism

I mean, and that kind of had not really a down side, I always pushed myself harder than anyone else pushed me. I remember when I was in fifth grade, my school had this special gifted program even above and beyond the ones that they already had for the classroom setting, and it was an afterschool program. (pp1, page 20)

But on the other hand I can remember calling my dad when I was in eighth grade work and I got a B+ in calculus or something. I mean, I don't even remember what it was. I remember being so bummed out, and I was so scared to tell him and everything, and he was like, well, you know, you'll just work harder next, you know, gives you something to shoot for, or whatever. But to me it

was just that I couldn't believe it, what I had missed. It wasn't that I got a B+. Like, that was good, it was I could have gotten an A, I should have worked harder, I could have done. So I was always kind of like that. (pp1, pages 20–21)

I was good at everything. And I really tried to keep that up, I mean I tried to meet that reinforcement all the time. I never thought of it as pressure though. I think a lot of it because it wasn't external to me. It wasn't people saying to me, you need to do this or that, it was a lot of what I had internalized as their expectations, or like, you know. Or maybe expectations that they had for my sisters that, you know, I just kind of assumed that. I never understood the age difference. I didn't understand emotionally or intellectually why I shouldn't know calculus when my sisters could do it. (pp1, page 22)

So that was really different for me. When I started to focus more on my health and my weight, it was like, is what I'm doing wrong? If everyone else thinks this way, I'm not doing that, it was more critical of myself than of their behavior. I mean I was always the first one to point out things that were wrong with me than what was right. (pp2, page 19)

I knew I needed help, but the people who I kept seeing just didn't get it, they just didn't get it, and they wanted to put me on all sorts of medications, and I'm so anti-drug, just because I still have this superwoman syndrome thing, that I can do it, I don't need help. (pp2, page 37)

Coding and categorizing are critical analytic activities that help us sort through oral history data. Codes themselves, however, are only labels until they too are analyzed (Saldaña, 2009, p. 32). Analytic memo writing is how a researcher talks to herself about the data (Clarke, 2005). Saldaña writes the following:

> "The purpose of analytic memo writing is to document and reflect on: your coding process and code choices; how the process of inquiry is taking shape; and the emergent patterns, categories and subcategories, themes and concepts in your data—all possibly leading toward a theory . . . Your private and personal written musings before, during, and about

> the entire enterprise is a question-raising, puzzle-piecing, connection-making, strategy-building, problem-solving, answer-generating, rising-above-the-data heuristic. (p. 32)

Analytic memos are a bridge from coding to the final write-up (discussed in Chapter 4) (Saldaña, 2009). Memos can be written about many different aspects of the data and your relationship to it. Saldaña (2009) writes:

> [A]nalytic memos are opportunities for you to reflect on and write about:
>
> - how you personally relate to be participants and/or the phenomenon
> - your study's research questions
> - your code choices and their operational definitions
> - the emergent patterns, categories, themes, and concepts
> - the possible networks (links, connections, overlaps, flows) among the codes, patterns, categories, themes, and concepts
> - an emergent or related existent theory
> - any problems with the study
> - any personal or ethical dilemmas with the study
> - future directions for the study
> - the analytic memos generated thus far
> - the final report for the study (p. 40).

Returning to Claire's coded data, *perfectionism* had emerged several times in my early memo notes during my immersion into the raw transcripts, and became a meta-code category, as noted earlier. During the coding process I gleaned insights into the various facets of Claire's life in which perfectionism played a role. From this process I developed the category "perfectionism" writing the following analytic memo:

Box 2.3
Memo on perfectionism

Claire's "perfectionism" started at a young age. She excelled academically and athletically. From a young age she received both formal and informal rewards for her achievements. With respect to formal rewards, she was placed in a program for "gifted" students. With respect to informal rewards, her parents praised

her for her achievements. She internalized this system of validation, and transformed it into a system of personal motivation and self-pressure.

I believe her parents' divorce fuelled her try to impress them, particularly her father (note possible connections between the categories "perfectionism" and "impact of divorce" and "disappointment").

Claire's "perfectionism" played a very significant role in the development of her body image dissatisfaction, eating disorder, as well as the extent of her eating disorder and her refusal to get professional help. Several notes in this regard:

The drive for perfectionism Claire had sought academically was transferred onto her quest for a "perfect" body when she went to college. In elementary school, Claire would feel like a failure for receiving a "B+" instead of an "A." In college, she would feel like a failure if she could not achieve the "perfect" body. Further, when her eating disorder worsened, and she was diagnosed with anorexia nervosa, she felt like a failure for not being able to get herself healthy again without help. Her drive for perfectionism, coupled with her drive for independence, prevented her from accepting professional help for her disorder (note possible connections between the categories "perfectionism" and "independence").

Claire repeatedly notes that she suffers from a "superwoman syndrome"—a feminist concept referring to women trying to "have it all" and feeling like failures when they cannot (see Hesse-Biber, 1996). Claire is noting a gendered dimension to her drive for perfectionism. This strikes me as important data—the literature will be helpful here.

Coding, categorizing, and analytical memo writing generally occur simultaneously, as a back-and-forth or cyclical process. At this point in the data analysis process, interpretation is occurring. In other words, I am beginning to develop meaning, and perhaps build theory out of the data. In order to interpret your data ask the following questions:

- What patterns are emerging?
- What themes are emerging?

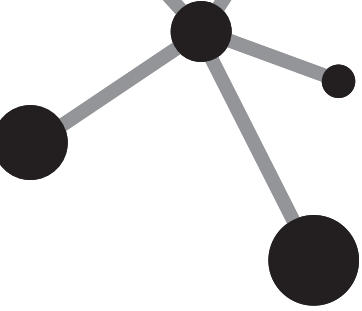
- What connections can I make between different parts of the data/different code categories? What is the relationship between code categories?
- What does the data reveal about processes?
- What connections do I see between the micro level of analysis and the macro level of analysis?
- How does my literature review help me to make sense of the coded data?
- What story or stories are emerging out of the data?
- How does this person's experience speak to other people's experiences?
- What overarching issues about social life flow from this person's experiences and cross over to other people's experiences?

By addressing these questions you can interpret your data, and thereby link the experiences of individuals to social processes, social circumstances and sociohistorical context. Through this process an emergent theory may begin to develop, or a preexisting theory may gain support. You may also categorize your memo notes based on their content in order to assist your interpretive process (Saldaña, 2009). This is a central part of meaning-making, which may include theory building.

For example, in Claire's study, I developed a theoretical explanation out of the coding, categorizing, and memo writing process, as well as my immersion into the literature on female body image. Grounded in the data, I developed the concept of a "matrix" of pressures that informed Claire's eating disorder. Moreover, I built a theory that situated Claire's body image identity process in a matrix of interrelated sociocultural and social/psychological processes (see Leavy & Sardi-Ross, 2006). Ultimately, her oral history serves as a case study that highlights the factors that impact many college-age women with respect to body image development.

Note

1. Grounded theory is an inductive approach where some data is collected and analyzed, and then more data is collected and analyzed—with each phase of data collection informing the next phase of data collection. Further, the analysis process involves developing codes directly out of the data (grounded in the data).



3

WRITING UP THE METHODOLOGY SECTION

AFTER METHODOLOGICAL decision making has occurred and the research has been carried out, it is time for the write-up. A typical write-up involves representing the research methodology and the research findings in separate sections. It is the task of this chapter to review writing up the methodology. Oral history projects in the social sciences typically result in either an article (or series of articles), or a monograph. The extent to which various aspects of the methodology are reviewed is in part determined by space limitations, particularly in the case of articles. The write-up examples provided in this chapter reflect the space constraints of research articles. Book authors can elaborate various dimensions of the write-up at their discretion. Given the multiplicity of oral history perspectives and practices, the content of this chapter should be viewed as a rendering of issues to consider, not a mandate for how the methodology must be represented.

Furthermore, there are various approaches that qualitative researchers apply to representing their research, and many forms that representation can take, beyond traditional articles and monographs. For example, arts-based forms of representation include,

but are not limited to: research poems, fictionalized writing, performance scripts, visual works, photographic installations, and many other forms. However, this text focuses on the traditional academic article format, which is the most common form for representing oral history research. The next chapter introduces you to "analytical" and "impressionist" approaches to representation. This chapter presumes the more traditional analytic write-up; however, the issues covered may be applicable in some forms of impressionist writing, too, at least implicitly. My goal is not to prioritize analytical writing as better, but rather to focus on the most common type of write-up, for instructional purposes.

Before going further it is important to make a note about terminology. Often, final write-ups will include a section with one of the following labels: methods; research methods; procedures; the project; or methodology. In this book I employ the term *methodology,* and although any of these terms are appropriate headings for a discussion of research design, data collection, analysis and interpretation, I think *methodology* most accurately accounts for the various and interrelated components of oral history practice. *Methods* or *research methods* refer to data collection tools. *Procedures* is often used as an alternative to the terms *methods* or *research methods,* and is arguably a broader term, referring to what research tools were used, and what steps were followed (although I suggest this term is more appropriate for quantitative research). Sometimes researchers will use the section heading, "the project" or "about the project." I like the simplicity of this description; however, I have concerns that it may make attention to methodology appear less rigorous. When reading research articles detailing oral history projects, you will most often encounter a *methods*, *research methods*, *procedures*, or *project* section. Nevertheless, I encourage you to consider using the term *methodology* as a part of a holistic or integrated approach to oral history. (A section titled "the project" is perhaps the best alternative, and may challenge the bias that qualitative research is not methodologically sound.)

Qualitative research is a holistic endeavor (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). This means that qualitative researchers are attentive to how research is conceptualized, how literature and theory guide the research process, how and why research design decisions are made, how research is carried out, how ethical issues come to bear on the

process, how analysis and interpretation are crafts, and how published research may be used. This is all true in oral history practice, as in other qualitative practices. Therefore, when writing about these choices in the final write-up, it is important to clearly denote the breadth of methodological issues that have come to bear on the process. The term *methodology* encompasses all of these issues. Harding (1987) notes that a methodology is a theory of how research does or should ensue (p. 3). The term is commonly defined as a strategy for how a study will be carried out (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2005). In short, a methodology is a plan that includes how the researcher will proceed, beginning with stating his or her research purpose(s) and formulating his or her research question(s), all the way through analysis and interpretation (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2005). Therefore, in this book I employ the term *methodology*.

Before getting into the specifics of what the methodology write-up should include, there are three overarching issues to address. First, there is the issue of tone. It is important to consider the tone of your writing and how it may influence the experience of reading your work. Issues to consider include whether you will write in first or third person, how you refer to your research participants (in ways that can range from personalizing to dehumanizing), and the clarity and complexity of your language choices. Generally speaking, I recommend writing in the first person, as it invites readers into the write-up, locates the researcher and his or her voice in the project, and is usually a more personal way of writing. However, sometimes specific academic journals will require that part or all of an article be written in the third person. You should follow the writing style and dictates of the journal you are writing for, or select a journal that welcomes writing in the style you are comfortable with. With respect to how you refer to your research participants, in accord with the tenets of the oral history method itself I recommend personalizing the participants with whom you have collaborated whenever possible. First and foremost, always talk about the participants as people, not as research "subjects." Use their language when possible, communicate the tone of their talking style through examples, and note some of their unique characteristics and/or experiences. Even when selecting pseudonyms you can select one that is ethically consistent with

your participant's background, or ask them to select their own pseudonym. Finally, the most elegant writing is usually the simplest. If there are only a handful of people in the world who can understand your oral history write-up, you have done something wrong. Bear in mind that your goal is to communicate what you have learned from your study so that others can also understand. Your research should be useful, so it follows that it should be intelligible.

Second, the way you choose to write up your methodology section will be based partly on your research purpose. This is because your methodology section should answer the following questions:

- What did you aim to do?
- How did you do it?

Third, perhaps the biggest issue in reporting your methodology is *disclosure*. In oral history research, as in most qualitative research, full disclosure of methodological decision making is vital. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, the criteria by which qualitative research is judged, and oral history research in particular, requires *full disclosure* and *transparency* of methodological decision making. This means that you must be transparent about what you did and why you did it. Readers should be able to clearly see what you did, how you did it, and why you did it. This does not mean that every minute detail must be included, not at all, but a clear and multidimensional picture should be painted. This is explicated further later. There are two overall strains of decision making that should be recounted in the methodology section: *the context of discovery* and the *context of justification*.

The context of discovery refers to the researcher's role in the methodological procedures. The practice of oral history, like most qualitative research, assumes that research is value-laden and not value-neutral. Researchers bring their own agendas and perspectives to the research process. Researchers are invested in their projects. This is a valuable part of the research endeavor, and not be glossed over or disavowed. Issues to report on in this strand may include the following:

- How did you come to your topic? What made you interested in your topic?

- From what standpoint did you approach your topic? What were your goals, your assumptions entering the process, emotional and/or political stakes in the research, and so forth? How did your status characteristics (such as a race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, age and so forth) come to bear on the research process? For example, how, if at all, did insider/outsider characteristics influence the research process?
- What was the nature of your relationship with the participants throughout the process? For example, were there conflicts? What was your approach to the process of rapport-building? What was it like to end the process?
- How much personal information did you disclose to your participants? Why?

The context of justification refers to research design choices, data collection procedures, and data analysis and interpretation procedures. Issues to report on in this strand may include the following:

- A statement of your research purpose
- A statement of your research questions
- Your sampling procedures and a discussion of the composition of your sample
- Why you selected oral history as an appropriate research method
- Data collection procedures (the interview process)
- Analysis procedures (coding, memo-writing, analysis teams, triangulation, the use of theory)
- Interpretation procedures (including the role of literature and/or theory)
- Ethical issues (statement regarding IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval, informed consent, and whether or not there were any risks and/or benefits to the research participants)

Oftentimes researchers focus on the context of justification, and entirely neglect the context of discovery. I advocate a robust discussion of both the context of discovery and the context of justification. This kind of transparency, often referred to as "disclosure" in the qualitative literature, is vital for the later evaluation of oral

history research. In her pioneering work, Harding (1993) refers to this practice as "strong objectivity." This means instead of disavowing our place within the research process (favoring a scientific standard of value-neutral objectivity) we must own and disclose our position within the project, beginning with our interest in the topic. In order to be able to properly reflect on and write about this process, you must keep an "audit trail" from the beginning of your project. This includes making personal notes as you determine your topic and everything that follows. While pragmatic issues such as space limitations do play a role in methodology write-ups, it is important to discuss all of these issues as relevant to a particular oral history project, even if the discussion is brief. Of course, disclosure must be balanced with issues such as readability. You shouldn't overwhelm your readers with an onslaught of methodological information just for the sake of disclosure. There must be a balance between transparency and efficient reporting. Accomplishing this is an important step towards lending your study authenticity in the eyes of readers.

Methodology write-ups typically report on research design choices, data collection and analysis procedures, and ethical issues. The remainder of this chapter is divided by these topics, paying attention to both "context of discovery" and "context of justification" issues together.

Report on Research Design Choices

For instructional purposes I have broken down the report on research design choices into six questions that you should respond to in your methodology section, although many variations are possible.

1. How did you come to your topic? Why were you interested in researching it? What is your stake in this area?

Qualitative researchers come to their topics for a variety of reasons. These should be briefly stated in your methodology section. Reasons may include any of the following:

- *Personal investment in the topic.* This may be due to a personal experience, the experiences of a loved one, a

longstanding interest in the topic, or a new curiosity about the topic.
- *Political investment in the topic*. This may be due to a political or social activist orientation such as feminism, GLBT rights, and so forth. This may also be a result of social change that is happening, or a pressing need you have identified. For example, a local development or urbanization project, a local environmental issue, and so forth.
- *Prior research in this area*. Often when a researcher has conducted research on a particular topic they become interested in conducting future research on that topic or a related topic. It is a common practice for researchers to suggest areas for future research in the conclusion of their research articles—sometimes researchers will pursue these additional lines of inquiry in their own future projects.
- *Funding opportunities or other pragmatic considerations*. There are also grant opportunities available for researchers willing to conduct research in a particular area. Oral history research is no exception as large-scale projects are often initiated in order to serve a pressing need (for example, documenting firsthand, lived experiences of national disasters such as Hurricane Katrina, or international disasters such as the earthquake in Haiti). Other considerations, such as access to participants, may also inform topic selection (sometimes researchers have unique access to particular populations).

2. What was your research purpose?

Methodology sections should contain a clear statement of your research purpose. This statement should appear early on in the methodology write-up (as your purpose will situate your formulation of research questions and later steps). This statement should be followed with a brief discussion of any assumptions you bring to bear on the topic (perhaps as a result of a literature review you conducted, or your political commitments, guiding theory, or your own prior research in this area). You will return to your research purpose statement when you write up your research findings (noting whether or not you fulfilled your purpose and how your findings affirm and/or challenge your expectations).

3. What were your guiding research questions?

A discussion of your research purpose statement should also include a clear listing or discussion of the guiding questions that you sought to answer through your research. You will return to your research questions when you represent your research findings (one way of organizing a discussion of your research findings is based around your initial research questions; this and other approaches will be discussed in Chapter 4).

4. What role did your literature review play in framing your topic, research purpose, and research questions?

The literature review itself may be incorporated into the introduction, the methodology section, or it may comprise its own section. I will present a brief discussion of literature reviews as a subsection of methodology sections; however, this is only one possible option.

A literature review synthesizes the current/relevant available research on your topic. A literature review generally includes empirical research that has been conducted on your topic; however, it may also include meta-reviews of the research done on your topic, as well as theoretical work. As noted, the literature review can be placed in different parts of the final write-up. If the literature review has been integral to the framing of your topic, research purpose statement, and/or research questions, then it might be appropriate to place a literature review within the methodology section. You should note that the literature review is often referenced in the findings write-up as a way of adding credibility to your interpretations of the data.

5. Why did you decide that oral history is the most appropriate method to carry out your research?

Your methodology section should include a statement of why you selected oral history as the primary data collection tool. When justifying the selection of oral history, consider returning to the questions in Chapter 1 and using some of those questions as the

basis for explaining your methods choice. To recap, those questions are:

- What kind of data are you interested in?
- Do you have a specific topic about which you want to ascertain data?
- How much background information are you interested in?
- Do you have a specific list of questions you seek to gain responses to?
- What size sample of participants are you seeking?
- Do you need to seek similar data from all of the research participants?
- Do you want to compare the responses of different participants or groupings of participants?
- How much depth are you after?
- How much breadth are you after?

Also as noted in Chapter 1, oral history is uniquely adept at the following: (1) tapping into processes; (2) micro–macro linkages; (3) comprehensive understanding; (4) bearing witness and filling in the historical record; (5) collaboration in the meaning-making process; and (6) focusing on the participants' perspectives. If you came into the project with any of these interests, you can discuss this as a way of explaining your selection of the oral history method.

If you used oral history as one method in a mixed-method project or a case study project, you should also discuss how the various methods used interact with or inform each other (see Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011 for a discussion of mixed-methods approaches to research).

6. What was your sample?

The methodology write-up is where you discuss your sampling procedures and describe your sample. First, discuss what you wanted. In other words, describe the kinds of participants you were looking for (for example, if they share a social characteristic such as gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age; if they share a geographic location; if they share an experience such as an event).

Then discuss how you tried to locate the kinds of participants you were looking for. To do this, explain your recruitment strategy (possibly including any notes about sampling successes or failures, if relevant). Finally, note the composition of your sample (the number of participants and any relevant information about them, such as their demographics or some shared social identity or personal experience). After reading this part of your methodology section, readers should have a clear understanding of how you got your participants and who, in a generalized sense, they are. If your participants have considerable differences from each other, then note their differences as well as their commonalities.

Report on Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The heart of the methodology write-up is a report of data collection, analysis, and interpretation procedures. After reading this part of the write-up, readers should have a clear sense of how you gathered data and how you made sense out of that data. Consistent with the rest of the methodology report, write in an honest and open manner, noting any major issues that emerged, tensions, "failures" and so forth. In other words, provide a clear description of what you did and how it went. There are four major dimensions of your methods procedures that should be reviewed in this part of your write-up. I have again broken these down into questions you should seek to answer.

1. What was your process of data collection?

This is where you review your interview process. Issues to be discussed might include: setting up the interviews, rapport building, pre-interview meetings, the interview sessions, any ethnographic observations (and/or inclusion of objects), and any post-interview meetings or correspondence. In this part of your report, make the interviewing process transparent. For example, you should note where the interviews occurred, how long they lasted, if you recorded the interview sessions on tape or video, and if you used an interview guide. If you did use an interview guide, you might include it as an appendix. In projects involving multiple participants,

you will need to provide ranges. For example, participants were interviewed in 2–3 sessions lasting 45–80 minutes. You might also discuss any specific techniques you used to help facilitate your interviewees to narrate their stories. For example, some researchers disclose something about themselves as a jumping-off point, others begin with a question about a memory of a time or event, and some offer a vignette to get participants talking. If strategies like this were used, you can mention it.

2. What was your transcription process?

After you discuss your data collection procedures it is time to review your approach to transcription. In this section you should disclose how the interviews were transcribed. Did you transcribe the interviews yourself, or was it done by a research assistant or transcriber? Were the interviews transcribed verbatim? If not, explain what was transcribed and what was not transcribed. It is important to justify the choices that you have made, if they may strike readers as peculiar. If you initially transcribed the interviews verbatim and then edited them, explain how and why you did this. Your explanation should disclose any impact the process of editing might have on meaning-making. Some researchers make early memo notes during their process of transcribing the interviews. In these instances it is necessary to detail this process.

Beyond issues of editing (or what some researchers refer to as "beautification") you should also mention relevant formatting issues. For example, if you employed italics, bold font, or other means of distinguishing between the researcher and participant voices when denoting dimensions such as tone, volume, and so forth, these should be clearly noted. Noting these formatting issues may be important for readers later when they read the research findings section, which includes excerpts of transcripts. If you think these issues are clear in the findings write-up without discussion, then you don't need to mention them.

Finally, if, as a step toward ensuring confidentiality you assigned participants pseudonyms or numbers, this can be noted here or in the findings write-up when you first present interview data.

3. What was your process of data analysis?

This is where you talk about your process of analyzing the data—sorting through and categorizing the "raw" data (the interview transcripts). In order to accomplish this, recount your process of coding and analytical memo writing. Be clear about the steps you followed during analysis.

Explain your process of initial immersion into the data.

- Did you listen to the tapes? Did you read through the transcripts, and if so, how many times? Did you mark them up, and if so, what was your process for doing this?

Next, review the strategy you employed to code the transcripts. Discuss your process of memo writing as well. There may be some variation in how oral history researchers approach this.

- How did you code the interview data? Did you use a qualitative software program? Did you employ line-by-line coding? If not, how did you code? How did initial codes develop (inductively, out of the participants' own words, or in some other way)? How many phases of coding did you go through (i.e., initial coding, focused coding)? In this vein, explain your process of refining codes. How did you move from codes to categories? What role did memo writing have in this process? What kinds of topics did you write memos about?
- Was grounded theory employed, and if so, how?

If you employed strategies to build additional reliability into the data, such as having more than one person code the data for "inter-coder reliability," this should be noted. If you engaged in "analysis cycles" or collaborated with your participants during analysis, this should also be clearly noted.

As reviewed in Chapter 2, sometimes observational (or ethnographic) data is included in oral history projects. Material objects, from photographs to family heirlooms, are sometimes included as well. Autoethnographic data may also be included. This is data that develops out of the researcher's own experiences. If any of these kinds of data were collected/included, the methodology section should review how they were coded.

- If you included ethnographic observations discuss your process of coding and organizing these observations. What role did memo writing have in the process of analyzing your ethnographic observations? How, if at all, did you connect this data to the interview data?
- If you included nonverbal/material data such as photographs and/or objects, discuss your process of coding and cataloguing these items. What role did memo writing play in the process of analyzing these items? Did you connect your notes about these items to your interview codes and/or interview memos?
- If you included autoethnographic data—your own autobiographical experiences—how was this data included? How, if at all, have you distinguished between this data and the oral history or ethnographic data? How did this data inform your analysis and/or interpretation of the oral history data?

Although this section as a whole might be very brief in the final write-up, it is important that readers can clearly see the analysis/coding strategy that was employed. The fruits of that process (examples of coded data) are generally not presented in the methodology write-up, but in the findings write-up, which is considerably lengthier than the methodology report.

4. What was your process of data interpretation?

Finally, your methodology section should include a review of your interpretation strategy. In short, this section should denote how you moved from the analyzed data to interpreting that data. In other words, how did you build meaning out of the coded data?

- Did the research participants have a role in the interpretive process? If they did, what was their role and how did that work? What issues/conflicts arose and how were they handled? How were these issues negotiated? How were mutually agreed-upon expectations created?
- How were codes merged to create meta-code categories?
- How were connections built between meta-code categories? What was your process? How did themes emerge? How did

patterns emerge? How did an emergent theory develop, and/or how was an existing theory on theories supported/used? Were macro-level theories used to help understand micro-level data, and if so, which ones, and how?
- How did the literature review inform data interpretation? In other words, how did existing literature (empirical and/or theoretical) guide data interpretation?
- How were linkages between participants made? How were similarities and differences noted? How did you deal with anomalous data?
- How were micro–macro links made? How did you connect the experiences of the individuals in your study to larger sociocultural issues? Again, how did literature and/or theory play a role in this process?
- Did you triangulate the oral history data with other sources of data? If so, explain.

After reading this part of the methodology section, readers should have a clear understanding of how you made sense out of the data. The report on data collection and analysis procedures is meant to simply and clearly inform readers how data was collected, analyzed, and interpreted. In other words, it is a brief but specific review of your methods procedures. It is not a place for "showing your data." This will be done in the research findings section. However, your methods procedures must be clearly stated so that when readers move on to your report of research findings, which will be the bulk of your write-up, they will understand the process by which you garnered the data that you are showing, and the process by which you have made assertions about that data. This becomes clearer in Chapters 4 and 5.

Report on the Ethical Issues in the Study

There are four ethical issues that should be noted in the methodology section. Typically these issues are very briefly addressed; however, ethical issues may, in some instances, later permeate the research findings write-up and discussion. In the methodology write-up, four questions should be succinctly answered. I advocate a brief mention of these ethical issues in the methodology

write-up, and a return to these issues in the presentation of research findings.

1. Did you obtain IRB approval?

Your methodology write-up should clearly state that IRB approval was obtained. If IRB approval was not granted, this should be noted and explained. For example, if your institution does not have a formal institutional review board then you should note this, and move on to your broader discussion of ethical practice. In these instances, perhaps you had colleagues review your research proposal.

2. How did you obtain informed consent?

Your methodology write-up should clearly and succinctly explain your process of obtaining informed consent. To do this, state whether or not you used an informed consent form, and note any other written explanations of the research that you provided your participants. For example, review the initial contact letter, state the voluntary nature of the study (and if participants could stop their participation at any time) and how this was communicated to participants, and state how you are dealing with confidentiality and how this was explained to participants. If you faced any challenges, either getting approval for your study from your IRB or obtaining informed consent from any of your participants, this should be noted. Explaining how you dealt with these issues can be very helpful to other researchers who might embark on an oral history project. Some researchers include a copy of their informed consent form as an appendix to their final write-up. Other materials such as initial contact letters can also be included as appendices, but this is totally optional and will depend in part on space constraints (if an oral history project is represented in book form, then all of these materials should be included, as a good-faith measure).

3. Were there any risks associated with participation in the study?

If there were any risks associated with participation in the study, such as emotional or psychological distress, this must be noted in

the methodology write-up. You must also clearly state what safeguards you put in place in order to help protect your participants. For example, what was your strategy for discontinuing interviews, temporarily or otherwise, as a result of participant distress? Were you prepared to provide participants with information for obtaining services, therapeutic or otherwise, in the event that they requested it? Your protocols in this regard should be briefly explained (i.e., whether or not you offered information about these services, and whether this was only on request or at your discretion). The issue of possible risks is usually noted during the review of informed consent procedures. Many oral history projects do not carry significant foreseeable risks, and therefore this discussion may be omitted or abbreviated.

4. Were there any benefits to the participants?

Any benefits to the research participants should be noted in the methodology write-up (some researchers will include this discussion in their presentation of research findings or in their conclusion; some researchers will include brief mention of this in their methodology write-up and return to it later, either in their research findings section or in their conclusion—any of these approaches are fine, and are generally a matter of writing and presentation style). I typically advocate mentioning the benefits to participants in the methodology section, as this is an element of oral history methodology, and then returning to this issue later, either during the discussion of research findings or in the conclusion.

When there are benefits to research participants, it is important to clearly communicate this, as such benefits are a unique potential of oral history research and should therefore be documented. When thinking about benefits to participants consider the following:

- Were there any educational benefits to participants?
- Were the participants empowered through their participation?
- Did the oral history research benefit the community or group of which the participants are members?

Oftentimes, educational benefits and feelings of empowerment will be experienced hand in hand. If this is the case, it should be noted.

Sometimes the experience of empowerment results from having an opportunity to share personal experiences and perspectives and thereby, in a sense, have one's experiences and knowledge validated. Empowerment and educational benefits can also stem from participants having an opportunity to re-story their experiences as they narrate. This involves a process of reflection, recalling, remembering, reimagining—it is a process of putting the pieces together, and may be very beneficial to participants. This process can lead to a greater understanding of past or present issues for the participant. When this occurs it should be documented, as it speaks not only to the particular study but also to oral history as a unique research method. Community or group-level benefits should also be documented, as they speak to the social action possibilities and/or social policy implications of oral history research. Sometimes these benefits occur over time, and initial articles do not properly document these outcomes. Therefore, some oral history research requires multiple write-ups as time passes.

It is also important to explain how you have come to conclude that there were benefits to participants. Sometimes participants will say what their participation has meant to them during or immediately after an interview, or during post-interview communications. Other times you will discern the benefits of their participation during your analysis and interpretation of their interviews. Herein lies the rationale for my suggestion that you note possible benefits to participants in the methodology section, and return to this issue later as you report your research findings (or in your conclusion). This gives you an opportunity to make note of the *possible* benefits in the methodology section, and then discuss them in more detail once readers have seen your data. So, for example, in the methodology section you might note that you anticipated possible feelings of empowerment as a result of participation. Then later, as you are reporting your findings and/or discussing them, you might show readers spaces of empowerment (via quoted transcripts) that emerged as a result of the oral history process.

In the remainder of this chapter I offer examples of strong and weak methodology write-ups. These examples should not be viewed as templates into which information can be plugged in, but rather as illustrations of how one might approach the methodology write-up.

Since the point of this text is to provide instruction on how to write up and/or read oral history research, and not how to carry out that research, in the examples that follow—both good and bad—let's assume the research itself had been well designed and executed. The issue is how to appropriately write up research. For the first example let's return to the case of using oral history to study the experience of divorce for stay-at-home mothers. So, in the "good" and "bad" examples everything was done identically, but written up differently.[1]

Example 1A: A Weak Methodology Write-up (emphasizing the context of justification)

"The Experience of Divorce for Stay-at-Home Mothers"

This oral history project seeks to build knowledge about the experience of divorce from the perspective of stay-at-home mothers. Literature suggests this is an under-researched population, so this research is intended to fill a gap in our knowledge. Based on my reading of the current literature on divorce, "uncoupling," and motherhood, I conceptualize divorce as a process and assume it has particular bearings on the daily lives and identity formation of stay-at-home mothers. My research seeks to answer the following questions: (1) How have participants' lives changed through the divorce process? (2) How do participants explain the process by which they and their spouses made work and family decisions? (3) How do participants describe how their relationship with their former spouse has evolved from when they first met to the present? (4) How have participants' identities as mothers transformed throughout their marriage and divorce?

In order to carry out this research I sought a sample of divorced women who either are, or were, stay-at-home mothers. I initially posted research announcements on bulletin boards at local coffee shops, bookstores and grocery stores. I didn't receive any responses, so I turned to personal networks and a snowball sampling strategy. The result was a sample of 12 participants. The women ranged in age from 39–56, all had some college education, 2 were still stay-at-home mothers

(possible with child support and alimony) and 10 of the women were now working part- or full-time.

Oral history was selected because I was seeking firsthand experiential knowledge. I used the oral history interview method in order to gain as much depth as possible, while leaving participants ample room to emphasize what they deemed important. Given everyone's scheduling demands, setting up the interviews was challenging. All of the participants were interviewed in their homes and although I had requested privacy, in three instances the women's children were sporadically present during the interviews. Each participant was interviewed twice in open-ended interview sessions lasting 50–75 minutes. Participants signed IRB-approved informed consent forms prior to data collection, and entered into the interviews understanding that their participation was voluntary and could be stopped at any time, and that their identities would remain confidential. I also informed participants that I would stop tape recording at any time upon their request, or if they wanted to speak off tape or off the record. Although I had a broad interview guide with me, listing major lines of inquiry with a few specific questions, I rarely relied on it, and the women spoke freely, openly, and in depth. When the women would talk about their feelings I would frequently ask for elaboration or illustrations.

As participants were interviewed twice, I transcribed each woman's initial interview prior to conducting the second interview. I read each transcript in its entirety, making notations on it prior to the second interview. All interviews were transcribed verbatim (other than false starts and expressions such as "uh huh" which were omitted). Interview transcripts were then coded inductively, with code categories developing directly out of participants' language. I used a qualitative data analysis software package (insert name) to systematically code the data. I began with line-by-line codes. I then grouped "like" codes together into meta-code categories. At this point I began writing analytical memos in which I discussed each developing category. I noted the codes that comprised each category, the specific participants for whom the category seemed significant, the theoretical implications of the category, and possible links

to other categories. Through this process I began to note themes and patterns, and build an emergent theory about the unique ways that divorce impacts self-concept and identity construction for stay-at-home mothers.

The preceding example is not terrible; in fact, the researcher has done many things quite well, but it could be strengthened. With respect to what the researcher has done well, she has done a very good job recounting research design and data analysis choices with respect to "the context of justification." Ethical issues have been fairly well addressed, too. In short, the methodology write-up provides a good description of what was done and how it was done. What the researcher fails to adequately address is why it was done. This methodology write-up largely ignores the "context of the discovery." For example, there is vague mention of a gap in the literature, but no literature is provided to support or situate that claim. If the opening of the write-up also included how the researcher came to the general topic in the first place, this omission would not necessarily be problematic (if she provides a literature review elsewhere). As it stands, there is little by way of explaining why the research was done. Likewise, although she notes why she selected oral history as her method, she has not done enough to explain why she selected oral history as opposed to in-depth interview, for example. In this vein, it is similarly unexplained how initial interview transcription informed the second round of interviews.

The failure to disclose her position in the research is most apparent in the reviews of data collection and data interpretation. First, there is little transparency about the interview process itself. This is a sensitive topic. She notes that participants spoke freely and at such depth that the interview guide was rarely used, but she fails to explain how this was accomplished. How was rapport built? How was trust established? Were there any struggles in this regard? Did insider–outsider status play a role? For example, the researcher's gender seems likely to have had a role in this. Second, in terms of making sense of the data, while the analysis process is clearly reviewed, the interpretation process is fuzzier. What role did theory play in this process? What role did the literature review play in this process?

Finally, the write-up is tonally mixed. Although it is written primarily in the first person, which I recommend when possible, the research questions are presented rather coldly.

To sum up, Example 1A is a decent methodology write-up, but could be greatly strengthened with more transparency regarding the position of the researcher within the project from design through to interpretation.

Another common mistake that researchers make when representing their methodology is to overemphasize "the context of discovery" at the expense "the context of justification." The following is an example of the kind of write-up that results from this mistake.

Example 1B: A Weak Methodology Write-up (emphasizing the context of discovery)

"The Experience of Divorce for Stay-At-Home Mothers"

This oral history project seeks to build knowledge about the experience of divorce from the perspective of stay-at-home mothers. As a feminist scholar I am committed to generating knowledge from women's perspectives, and on topics uniquely important to women. For several years I have been conducting "identity" research about women. During this time I became interested in how women view themselves in relation to their relationship status. The current project is a natural offshoot of that work. Further, an early review of the literature suggested this is an under-researched topic. Therefore, I seek to fill a gap in our knowledge with descriptive qualitative data.

I decided to use a qualitative method of interview in order to gain inductive, firsthand knowledge that prioritized participants' perspectives and emphasized their language and experiences. Oral history was best suited to answer my research questions because of my conceptualization of a divorce as a process, not an event, and because following the literature, I also view identity construction as a process. Further, this is a gendered topic and I ultimately sought to make linkages between women's individual experiences and larger issues about

the gendering of parenting and work. Oral history enables these kinds of connections, and thus best facilitated my objectives. Moreover, given my feminist standpoint it was important to share authority with the participants.

My sample consisted of 12 women, all of whom were either one or two "degrees of separation" from me (a friend of a friend, or a friend of hers). Setting up the interviews was challenging as a result of scheduling demands; however, this created opportunities during pre-interview phone calls and emails to share information and expectations, and begin the process of rapport building. This also facilitated initial conversations. During this time, I informed each participant that I had been through my own divorce and that I am a mother. Moreover, I have several family members who have also been through the divorce process as parents. By sharing this personal information I was able to build trust, empathy, and ultimately rapport with the participants.

The study was approved by my IRB, and each participant signed an informed consent form prior to the start of their first interview. Consent forms explained confidentiality, and that participation was voluntary and could be stopped at any time. I also informed participants that I would stop tape recording at any time upon their request, or if they wanted to speak off tape or off the record. This did not occur, and the women seemed very comfortable speaking with me.

Each woman was interviewed twice in her home, and although I had requested privacy, in 3 instances the participants' children, ranging in age from 5–12, were home and interrupted the sessions at various times. As a part of ethical practice I did not record or take notes when a participant's child or children were present. I would have preferred privacy, but I understood that this is not always possible, especially for stay-at-home mothers. Conducting the interviews in the women's homes was important for two reasons. First, it made participants more comfortable, which facilitated their narrative process. Second, given the topic of the project, "the home" is an important space and thus may have facilitated narration in less obvious ways. Due to the rapport building during

pre-interview contact, during which I disclosed my own family experiences with divorce, the participants were very open to sharing their experiences.

All of the interview data was transcribed, coded, and interpreted. I drew on both my literature review and feminist theories of identity during this process.

In the preceding example the researcher does a good job of reviewing how she came to study this topic, the advantages of selecting the oral history method for this project, and the nature of her relationship with the research participants, including strategies for rapport building. She does not, however, properly review for research design, including sampling strategies and data collection and analysis procedures. For example, she does not note her major research questions; readers are left to infer that snowball or convenience sampling was probably employed (although this should be stated directly); the composition of the sample is not disclosed; whether or not an interview guide was used is not disclosed; and the process of transcription and data analysis (coding) is not disclosed. It is not enough to simply state that the data was coded; for example, readers must be told the process by which this occurred. In short, the research strategy is not disclosed and justified.

The following example retains the positive aspects of Examples 1A and IB, while doing a better job of attending to the both the "context of discovery" and the "context of justification."

Example 1C: A Strong Methodology Write-up

"The Experience of Divorce for Stay-At-Home Mothers"

This oral history project seeks to build knowledge about the experience of divorce from the perspective of stay-at-home mothers. As a feminist scholar I am committed to generating knowledge from women's perspectives, and on topics uniquely important to women. For several years I have been conducting "identity" research, and during this time I became interested in how women view themselves in relation to their relationship status. The current project is a natural offshoot of that work.

Further, an early review of the literature suggested this is an under-researched topic.

My major research questions are: (1) How do stay-at-home mothers' lives change through the divorce process? (2) How do women explain the process by which they and their spouses made work and family decisions? (3) How do women describe how their relationship with their former spouse evolved from when they first met to the present? (4) How do women's identities as mothers transform throughout their marriage and divorce?

Oral history was best suited to answer my research questions because of my conceptualization of both divorce and identity construction as processes, not events. Further, this is a gendered topic and I sought to make linkages between women's individual experiences and larger issues about the gendering of parenting and work. Oral history enables these kinds of connections, and emphasizes participants' perspectives.

In order to locate participants, I posted research announcements on local bulletin boards. Unfortunately, I did not receive any responses so I turned to personal networks, which resulted in a snowball sample of 12 participants. The women ranged in age from 39–56, all with some college education, and 11 identified as Caucasian and 1 as Asian. Homogeneity proved to be an unintended consequence of snowball sampling. Two of the women were still stay-at-home mothers, and 10 of the women were working part- or full time as a result of their divorces.

Setting up the interviews was challenging as a result of scheduling demands; however, this created opportunities during pre-interview phone calls and emails to share information and expectations, and begin the process of rapport building. During this time I disclosed my own family experiences with divorce.

The study was approved by my IRB, and each participant signed an informed consent form prior to the start of their first interview. Consent forms explained confidentiality, and that participation was voluntary and could be stopped at any time. I also informed participants that I would stop tape recording at any time upon their request, or if they wanted to speak off

tape or off the record. The participants were very open to sharing their experiences, so I rarely relied on my broad interview guide.

Each woman was interviewed twice in sessions lasting 50–75 minutes. All interviews occurred in the women's homes, and in three instances the participants' children were home and interrupted the sessions at various times. As a part of ethical practice I did not record or note-take when a participant's child or children were present. Conducting the interviews in the women's homes was important for two reasons. First, it made participants more comfortable, which facilitated their narrative process. Second, given the topic of the project, "the home" is an important symbolic and material space, and thus may have facilitated narration in less obvious ways.

In order to maximize the benefits of two interview sessions, I transcribed each woman's initial interview prior to the second interview. I read through the transcript, making notes regarding areas where I wanted to seek follow-up (elaboration, clarification, etc.). All interviews were transcribed verbatim, other than false starts and the like, which were omitted. I used a qualitative data analysis software package (insert name) to code the data. I began with line-by-line codes (developed out of participants' language whenever possible). I then grouped "like" codes into meta-code categories. At this point I began writing analytical memos about the meta-codes. I noted the codes that comprised each category, the relevant participants, theoretical implications, my impressions, and possible links between categories. Through this process I began to note themes and patterns and build an emergent theory about the unique ways that divorce impacts self-concept and identity construction for stay-at-home mothers. I drew on both my literature review and feminist theories of identity during this interpretive process.

The preceding example represents a balanced methodological write-up. The write-up attends to both the context of discovery and the context of justification. Readers are not inundated with unimportant information (the various ways divorce has personally impacted the researcher, or the locations of bulletin board recruitment postings), but they are still provided a nuanced picture with the relevant information about these topics. In other words, the researcher has made reasonable choices about what to include—the fact that an initial recruitment strategy failed, and that the resulting strategy produced a homogeneous sample is important, but the details of this process are less so. Likewise, her noting that she shared her personal experience with divorce is important for understanding both her position within the project, as well as the rapport building that clearly facilitated very fruitful interviews. However, including various details about her relationship to divorce is less important (particularly if space constraints will then prevent an adequate discussion of other issues).

Readers are also provided with a clear review of methods procedures—from the research purpose and questions, through the process of analysis and interpretation. Relevant information about what was done and how it was done ethically is provided.

With respect to tone, the use of the first-person voice invites readers in, while simultaneously claiming the researcher's position within the project. For instance, a third-person account might state, "This study seeks to investigate . . ." while a first-person account might read "I sought to investigate . . ." or, "My research seeks to . . ." There are other issues to consider when creating the tone of the writing. For example, using the language of "stay-at-home mothers" and "women" instead of "participants" during the statement of research questions, invites readers into the posing of the research questions. Slight reframing—like in the statement of research questions in Examples 1A and 1C—helps set the tone of the write-up. Sharing drafts of these write-ups with colleagues can assist you as you find the right tone.

In sum, Example 1C is a strong methodology write-up because it provides a balanced and clear rendering of what was done and why. The write-up is written simply, and invites the reader into the project.

Summing Up the Methodology Write-Up

As you draft your methodology write-up and later review it, consider the following questions:

The Point of the Study

- Have I explained what my study is about?
- Have I explained why I am studying this topic?
- Have I explained my research purpose?
- Have I noted my research questions?
- Have I explained why my study is worthwhile?

The Participants

- Have I provided readers with a clear understanding of who my participants are and how I located them?
- Have I reviewed my attention to ethical practice?
- Have I explained my relationship with my participants?

The Interviews

- Have I discussed my interviewing strategy and how it worked out?

Data Analysis

- Have I explained my transcription process? Have I provided a rationale for any unusual or quirky choices?
- Have I reviewed my coding process? Can readers be expected to "see" my process of sorting, coding and categorizing the data?

Data Interpretation

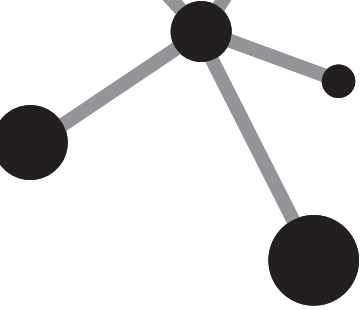
- Have I explained how I moved from data analysis to data interpretation? Can readers be expected to understand how I made sense out of the data—how meaning was built?

- Have I noted the role of literature, theory, triangulation, political commitments, and/or my prior research experience in this process? Can readers be expected to "see" the various influences impacting data interpretation?

In sum, can readers be expected to "see" what was done, how it was done, and why it was done? Is the process transparent? Is the process thoroughly reviewed?

Note

1. One more note about the examples that follow with respect to word count. For instructional purposes the two "weak" examples are basically the same word count (Example 1A is 605 words and Example 1B is 592 words). I have given myself an extra 100 words to write the "strong" methodology write-up example (Example 1C is 701 words). In sum, merging the best parts of the piece that is slanted towards the *context of justification* with the best parts of the piece that is slanted towards the *context of discovery* only required slightly extending the length. If space constraints demanded, Example 1C could be edited down further (or expanded).



4

WRITING UP THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

THIS CHAPTER reviews writing up oral history research findings. While Chapter 3 focused on how to write up the methodology report, what you did and why, this chapter focuses on writing up your findings—what you found, and what it means. Social scientists represent their oral history research in many ways. Therefore, this chapter presents a couple of major approaches but is not exhaustive. As noted in earlier chapters, I am providing instruction on writing an article; however, the approaches outlined can be adapted if the outcome is a book, book chapter, essay or some other form.

In this chapter I review two primary approaches to writing up oral history findings. The first approach involves writing *analytically*. In the social sciences, oral history researchers traditionally represent their findings by writing analytically (therefore, I spend the most time on analytical writing). The second approach involves writing *impressionistically*. Many oral history researchers draw on the storytelling possibilities of this style. It is important to bear in mind that whatever style you choose to write up your project, you are both a researcher and a writer. Writing as a researcher means that you are parceling out data (information) and explaining

that data. Writing as a writer means that you are a storyteller. Your research participants have shared parts of their life stories and experiences with you, and you now have to turn around and retell their story in a way that links it to the stories of others. Although writing analytically prioritizes the writer-as-researcher, you must remember you are still a storyteller. Although writing impressionistically prioritizes the writer-as-storyteller, you must remember you are also a researcher.

Each of the approaches to writing up oral history research that I review, analytical and impressionistic, can result in many different formats in which findings are represented, and several of these formats are reviewed. Additionally, whether writing analytically or writing impressionistically, researchers may be the sole authors of their write-ups, or they may collaborate with their research participants, producing co-constructed narratives.

Prior to reviewing analytic and impressionistic approaches to writing, however, there are several overarching issues that all researchers need to deal with as they write up their findings.

Outlining

I highly recommend beginning the writing process by outlining your write-up. Skipping this step will buy you trouble later on. Your outline is a rough guide for the flow of your write-up. The outlining process is how you develop a structure for your findings. The writing style and format you choose to work with will determine the nature of your outline and how rough or detailed it should be. For example, if you are producing an analytical write-up, your outline will help you build your conceptual framework. You may want to create a detailed outline noting how you move from codes to themes, and how you build evidence into the write-up (by way of transcript excerpts, literature and theory). If you are producing an impressionistic write-up, you may opt for a rough outline intended to help you build the narrative structure of the write-up. Irrespective of these particulars, oral history writing takes planning and organization. You would not build a house without architectural plans, even if those plans are later modified, and in the same way you should take the time to build a framework for your write-up.

Writing Clearly

Oral history research should be written clearly and accessibly. The final write-up is not a place for researchers to show "how smart they are" or how many "big words" they know. Although academics create jargon all the time, do not use it unless it is necessary. Instead, write simply, clearly, and understandably. Bear in mind that the work will be partly judged on its usefulness, its value. Simple writing can itself be a value added to the work. The write-up is an opportunity to paint a picture that diverse audiences can see and understand. Whether the painting resembles a Rembrandt (like in analytical writing) or a Monet (like in impressionist writing) is a stylistic choice, discussed shortly. Whatever style you write in, try to do so with the elegance of a writer sharing a story, not reciting their resume. Remember, you already have a great deal of authority in the oral history knowledge-building process, from topic selection to collaborative data generation to interpretation and representation. The act of writing or representing your research in many ways is the height of your authority in the oral history process. The power to write up oral history research is the power to frame the data, to decide what is included and excluded, to determine which voices are included and excluded (from the literature and the participants), and to create the balance of voices as you see fit. In short, writing is imbued with authority, and oral history researchers take this responsibility seriously. Frisch (1990) notes the word "author" is a located within the word "authority" to denote the inextricable relationship between writing and power. Bear this in mind as you approach the final write-up. Make your work accessible. I recommend taking former US poet Laureate Billy Collins' suggestion: when speaking of good poems, he said they are "easy to enter." Try to make your oral history write-up easy for audiences to enter.

Collaborative Writing with Participants

The decision whether or not to collaborate during the writing stage should be made early in the research process so that participant expectations can be met. If you have decided to work with your participant(s) during the writing stage, it is important to consider

two primary issues. First, to what extent will the writing be collaborative? Most commonly, if there is collaboration during this stage it involves giving participants the write-up or parts of the write-up for their feedback. Clear expectations should be set for how feedback/notes will be incorporated into the final write-up. Far less commonly, but equally validly, participants may co-author with the researcher. This can occur in different ways and again, setting up clear expectations (as well as a timeline) is vital. Newer forms of "impressionistic" writing provide a wide range of creative approaches to co-authorship. For example, the write-up may appear as conversation between the researcher and participant(s), or the body of the text may be written by the researcher with an epilogue written by the participant, or many other possibilities. Second, how will the various contributors appear in the final representation? In other words, how will you make the process clear and appropriate?

Writing collaboratively can be a very challenging process, and it may not always go smoothly. Don't be alarmed if there are bumps in the road. Also, expect things to take longer than you initially think—they usually do, especially when writing with others. Ultimately, the decision to write collaboratively, and the extent to which you do so, will be linked to your larger belief system regarding "sharing authority" (Frisch, 1990) in the oral history process. These decisions should be made in relation to the goals of particular projects, and in accord with the researcher's viewpoint.

Evidence: Showing the Data

The oral history transcripts are the data in your project. By the time you are ready to write up your findings, the coded data (analyzed data) is what you are working with. One of your primary goals is to show readers the data—to show them, in part, the oral history interviews. This is important for two reasons.

First, the interview transcripts serve as your evidence. They are the data about which you are making interpretive claims. When you note patterns and build themes, when you develop concepts or theory, or make claims about the usefulness of the existing concepts or theory, and when you link your interview data (micro level) to large-scale issues (macro level)—when you make these

and other claims, they must be grounded in and supported by your data. Therefore, the oral history interview transcripts are your evidence. You must carefully show selections of your transcripts in order to lead readers through your study and justify your interpretive claims. Cycling back to the issue of writing clearly and making a write-up "easy to enter," consider that showing your data is also a way of inviting readers into the project. This brings us to the second reason it is important to show the interview data.

It is through the interview transcripts that the voices of participants are brought into the write-up. As noted in Chapters 1 and 2, oral history interview emphasizes the voices of participants: what they say and how they say it. Giving readers a sense of the participants, in their own language, is a central part of writing up oral history research. Incorporating parts of the transcripts, sometimes quite extensively, is generally how you bring the participants' voices into the write-up.

When selecting how to use the interview data in the final write-up, there are issues to consider which relate not only to clarity, evidence, and voice, but also to the overarching issue of ethical practice.

The Presentation of Evidence and Ethical Practice

The creation and use of "evidence" in oral history writing requires attention to ethics, a key component of all oral history writing. There are two interrelated issues you must consider as you select transcript excerpts, decide where to place them, and how to present and discuss them: (1) transcript selection and editing, and (2) being clear about who is "speaking" (including the balance between researcher and participant voices).

Transcript Editing, Selection and Placement

Transcript editing, selection, and placement are significant components of meaning-making. Most editing decisions regarding the transcripts have been made by the time you are writing up your findings. However, there is still an opportunity for further editing. For example, if you initially decided to use a verbatim transcript, you may change your mind when you begin piecing the write-up

together. You may decide to delete false starts or slang. You may decide to "clean up" the transcript by removing phrases such as "you know?" As you engage in this process, always be mindful about whether you are changing meaning or homogenizing participants (by making it sound as if they all speak the same way). Although some measure of "beautification" may help you best present the data, you want to avoid dehumanizing the participants. Canned speech will not feel authentic to readers, and as reviewed in the next chapter, "trustworthiness" is a main issue when evaluating oral history research.

The next issue is transcript selection. By the time you are ready to write up your findings, you have extensive qualitative interview data to work with. Through analysis, you have organized and likely reduced the data; however, you still are working with far more data then you will be able to directly incorporate into your write-up. You will need to select transcript excerpts to include in the report. As noted earlier, as a result of the outlining process you should have some sense by this point about what aspects of the coded data you will use to structure your paper. The selection of transcript excerpts is vital, as in analytical writing they serve as the primary basis of credibility for your claims, and the primary way of bringing participants' voices into the write-up. It is important to use representative excerpts. If your study includes multiple participants, excerpts that highlight similarities and differences should be used. If you are electing to use anomalous data, this should be clearly noted. Likewise, the omission of anomalous data should be noted.

An issue related to transcript selection is excerpt placement. The placement of participant voices and juxtaposition of their statements, or of their statements to your statements, is all part of meaning-making. There is no cookie-cutter model for approaching transcript selection and placement. Your awareness of the ethical implications of these choices will be heightened as you engage in this process. This internal monitor is often your best guide.

Who is Speaking? Balancing Researcher and Participant Voices

As you incorporate interview data into the write-up it is imperative to be clear about who is speaking. Researcher and participant voices must be clearly distinguished. Participants' voices are not

just represented by quoted transcripts, which makes this process even trickier. Bear in mind that at times, you will likely paraphrase participants and present their viewpoints in your language, with statements such as "several participants noted that . . ." or "two participants expressed . . ." Therefore, it is your ethical responsibility to be clear about whose perspective is being expressed. In this vein, you must also consider the balance of researcher and participants' voices. There is great variability in how much you can choose to include your voice and the voices of participants. Your research purpose, research questions, the nature of your topic, and the writing style you employ will all help determine the balance of voices.

For example, in the study of divorce for stay-at-home mothers it may be important to extensively bring in the participants' voices because there are multiple participants, and one of the goals of this study is to gain in-depth experiential knowledge from their perspectives. Their own language, concepts, and so forth are very important. As you'll see later in this chapter, in the example of Claire's body image oral history project, the write-up incorporates the researchers' voices extensively, too. This is because the woman interviewed was still visibly quite ill with her eating disorder (although she claimed she was much better), requiring higher levels of interpretation from the researchers. Further, the goal in that study was to explore the web of factors that coalesced in Claire's body image struggle, and the researchers therefore play a fairly substantial role in making those linkages visible to readers.

In sum, the balance of researcher and participant voices is important and variable. Skinner (2003) suggests finding an appropriate balance is a part of "the ethics of writing." Bearing this in mind will help guide you.

There is one final issue to consider with respect to researcher and participant voices. As noted earlier, excerpts from interview transcripts are typically used as evidence when writing up oral history findings. When selections of the transcripts are presented, readers likely view them as expressions of the participant's voice. Put differently, the data takes on the appearance of coming from the participants. Rhodes (2000) points out that oral history interview data was co-created by the researcher and participant in the interaction of the interview(s). Therefore, Rhodes observes, quoted transcripts can obscure the role of the researcher in eliciting the data.

Rhodes uses the term "ghost writing" to denote the often invisible role of the researcher in creating the interview data. He discusses this issue in relation to writing up a project with a participant called "Bob." In the following excerpt, he discusses his approach to writing up the research findings with an awareness of the implicit danger of "ghost writing":

> . . . I incorporated as many direct quotations and turns of phrase that Bob had used as possible, and worked to tell the story in a similar tenor to what he had used in conversation . . . *Again, despite my intervention, my intent was to retain the characters, themes, plot, and setting from the interview conversation but to reorder them into the format of a written narrative similar to that of an autobiography. This written story, however, was not intended to be a replica of the interview but was designed to create a narrative congruence in feel and content to the discussion that transpired in the interview.* The text was then returned to Bob for review and feedback; all of his recommended modifications were subsequently incorporated into the text. This process of review and rewriting was iterated three times . . . (pp. 517–518) [italics added for emphasis]

It is important to be mindful of how we present different voices in the write-up. Robust methodological disclosure, as reviewed in the last chapter, goes a long way toward accounting for the potential issue of "ghost writing." Clearly denoting change of voice, including researcher comments/questions in excerpted transcript data, and discussing your impressions of participant remarks, are also possible strategies for proactively addressing this issue.

Drafting and Revising

Finally, before reviewing specific writing styles and corresponding formats for presenting your findings, it is important to note one final general issue: revision. Good writing involves drafting and revising. The importance of this process is heightened when writing up your oral history findings, because during the often long process of revising your work and then revising it again (and so on) you continue to refine your interpretation of the data and your

perspective on how to best present it. Cycles of rewriting will strengthen your thinking and writing. In this respect, rewriting is an interpretive act.

As you engage in cycles of writing and revision there are several strategies you can employ. First, it is always important to step away from what you are rewriting in order to gain some distance and freshen your vision. Oral history requires extensive investment in the process. Analysis and interpretation demand complete immersion into large quantities of qualitative data. Therefore, the peculiarities of oral history, particularly, suggest the need for space and distance, too, as we spend so much time close to the data. Rewriting is an opportunity to inject this space and reflection into the process. This may also give you an opportunity to consider alternative interpretations of the data, which is an important step toward building confidence in your findings (this issue is elaborated in Chapter 5).

The second strategy you can employ as you revise your write-up is to seek feedback from others. Researchers often share drafts of their work with colleagues. Allowing multiple sets of eyes to look at the work, think about the work, and offer suggestions to strengthen the work, can be very helpful. All writers need good editors. Ideally, the people with whom you share your work also have expertise to assist you to make connections, flesh out examples, and so forth. If analysis or reflection teams were used, their suggestions may be incorporated during the writing process (analysis and reflection teams are discussed in the following chapter).

Depending on your approach to collaboration, you can also share drafts of your write-up with your participants for their feedback. Whether or not you share the write-up with your participants during the drafting process is ultimately linked to the larger decision you have made about collaboration in the research process. As noted elsewhere in this book, you should make this choice based on what makes sense for the project you are working on, as well as your own comfort.

The Analytical Report

Analytical writing is the most common approach to oral history write-ups in the social sciences. The vast majority of published

oral history articles rely on some version of analytical writing. (For that matter, most oral history books by social scientists also follow the tenets of analytical writing.) When you do a search for oral history articles in the social sciences, you will most often come across analytical reports.

Generally, an analytical write-up presents a discussion of research findings that is organized directly around the coded data. This kind of writing involves descriptions and explanations of codes, categories, themes and/or patterns (Saldaña, 2011). Typically, the findings are directly organized around either codes, categories, themes or patterns (with subheadings used to denote each theme, etc.). Analytical writing seeks to describe groupings of data (coded data) and also to *explain* that data. Literature and/or theory are typically the bases of explanations. Often, as a part of explaining the oral history data, researchers develop concepts and theory to explain the data. Analytical write-ups show readers some the data, and then make linkages to larger conceptual and/or theoretical explanations.

The parts of the analytical write-up usually include the following (with the italicized portion being the primary focus of this chapter):

Table 4.1 **Traditional Analytical Write-up Template**
Keywords
Abstract
Introduction
Methodology Write-up
Literature Review or Historical Background
Research Findings (the interview data)
Discussion of Findings (interpretation of the data)
Conclusion
References (follow journal or publisher guidelines)

There are variations in the preceding template represented in Table 4.1. For example, sometimes the introduction and literature review are integrated into one opening section, and other times

the literature review is integrated into the methodology write-up. Sometimes researchers will use different language to denote these sections, or will have different sections in their write-up. For example, in addition to the terms *methods* and so forth, noted in the last chapter, the methodology write-up may be presented as one or more of the following sections: the *project*, the *interviewees*, the *interviews* (to name just a few). The presentation of the research findings and the discussion of research findings are not always separate; sometimes they are presented together. In short, the preceding template contains the parts of a traditional analytical write up; however, your information might not simply be "plugged into" this template—there are many ways to approach this.

Keywords

Keyword searches allow researchers and students to search databases for articles of interest. Therefore, an appropriate list of key words is vital for directing readers to your article. The term *oral history* should be included among your keywords, as sometimes researchers and students search for articles based on the method/methodology employed. The topical area, distinguishing features of participants, and bodies of guiding literature can also make for good keywords in an oral history study. For example, in Claire's body image oral history project, good keywords might include: oral history interviews, female body image, eating disorders, family pressures, feminism. In the study of divorced stay-at-home mothers, keywords might include: oral history interviews, stay-at-home mothers, divorce, identity as mothers, uncoupling. Each journal has its own guidelines for how many keywords you may include, and you should consult their submission guidelines. Typically, authors are allowed up to five keywords. I recommend using all of the keywords you are allotted to increase the number of potential hits your article receives.

Abstracts

Abstracts are an important way of telling readers what your article is about. In essence, an abstract is a summary of your article. It is important to include information such as the method or methods

used (so you should mention oral history interviews in the abstract), the purpose of your research, and your major findings. Most social science databases allow people to read abstracts of articles. This is an important part of how researchers and students compile literature reviews. Therefore, make certain to include vital information in your abstract. Researchers and students typically search for articles based on the method/methodology employed, and the topical area of the study. Different journals will have different word count requirements, so you should check the journal submission guidelines before writing your abstract. Although I typically recommend that abstracts be written in the first person (particularly if that is the style used in the rest of the oral history write-up) some journals require that abstracts be written in the third person.

Introduction

Introductions are short pieces of the write-up, but they have a big job. They invite the readers into the project, preface what follows, and highlight the major findings and/or insights one can expect to find. The introduction should note that you have conducted an oral history project about X topic, with X participants, seeking to find out about X. The introduction should also preface major findings of your work.

Sometimes oral history researchers open their writing with a quote from the literature, or an excerpt of an interview transcript. This is a way of inviting readers into the project and setting the tone of the writing. Sometimes researchers try to "set the scene" by bringing readers back in time to the event or period the oral histories focus on. This is common in projects with historical or event-based subject matter. These are, of course, only possible approaches to beginning your introduction. Many researchers simply begin with a statement such as: "This article draws on oral history research I conducted with X (or) about X . . . "

I recommend that you write your introduction after you have written the rest of your piece. It is at that point that you really understand what you have done and how you have represented it, and therefore the point at which you are in the best position to introduce the work to readers.

The Research Findings Write-Up

Chapter 3 reviewed the methodology write-up (and discussed literature reviews as well). Therefore, in this chapter I review the latter parts of the research write-up: the research findings, discussion of findings, and conclusion. First I review analytical write-ups, and then impressionistic write-ups. Analytical write-ups generally present research findings in two primary formats: (1) interweaving of the report of findings with the discussion, and (2) separating the report of findings and the discussion of findings. Oral historians in the social sciences tend toward the former, interweaving the presentation and discussion of findings, and so I devote more time to this.

Analytical Writing

As noted earlier, analytical write-ups are generally organized around codes or themes (although they may also be organized around the major research questions). For Claire's body image oral history project, my co-author and I organized our findings write-up around three major themes: perfectionism, autonomy, and control. Within our discussion of each theme, we noted code categories that comprise the theme (derived from our data analysis procedures). We initially decided to interweave our research findings and discussion (as represented in Example 1). I do, however, also briefly show how one might present the same findings by separating the presentation of findings and discussion (as represented in Example 2). The examples follow.

Example 1: An Example of an Analytical Write-Up that Interweaves the Research Findings and Discussion[1]

"Claire's Narrative: A Thematic Analysis"

During data analysis we were struck by the web of factors that came to bear on Claire's susceptibility to anorexia. Because Claire told her story as a chronological narrative from childhood to the present, it wasn't until data analysis that we were able to understand the emergence and re-emergence of particular themes at various moments in her life. The interconnections

between themes illuminates the complex reasons why some people may be more susceptible to an eating disorder than others who are otherwise similar in terms of gender, race, and socioeconomic status. In retelling her oral history narrative we present a thematic discussion of Claire's narrative, relying on the codes discussed earlier. The interplay between themes develops as we recount her story.

Striving for Perfection

Claire explained that she always wanted to excel, and in fact, perform flawlessly. As such, perfectionism was a dominant theme in her narrative. Through this theme we can see internal and external pressures operating together, including familial pressures and a self-imposed longing to "succeed." When describing her experiences in middle school Claire stated:

> I always pushed myself harder than anyone else pushed me. I remember when I was in fifth grade my school had this special gifted program even above and beyond the ones that they already had for the classroom setting and it was an afterschool program.

Other statements Claire made concerning her attempt for perfectionism center on the high expectations she believed her parents had for her:

> I can remember calling my dad when I was in eighth grade and I got a B+ in calculus or something, I mean I don't even remember what it was. I remember being so bummed out and I was so scared to tell him and everything and he was like, well, you know, you'll just work harder next [time], you know, gives you something to shoot for, or whatever. But to me it was that I couldn't believe it, what I had missed. It wasn't that I got a B+. That was good it was I could have gotten an A. I should have worked harder, I could have done more you know? So I was always kind of like that.

During one of the toughest times in her life, when she was battling anorexia nervosa, the same mentality emerged:

> I knew I needed help, but, the people who I kept seeing just didn't get it. They just didn't get it and they wanted to put me on all sorts of medications. I'm so antidrug, just because I still have this superwoman syndrome thing, that I can do it, I don't need help.

Scholarly research suggests that many women who develop eating disorders at some point in their life often strive to be a "superwoman." This term is used to denote American cultural standards which suggest that women should be able to have a successful marriage/family and career, without struggle (Epstein, Seron, Oglensky, & Saute, 1998; Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2005; Hochschild & Machung, 1989). While Claire was not starting a family, she was faced with multiple situations in which she felt she had to be totally committed; she was devoted to her academics, as well as to maintaining positive relationships within her family, and to "looking good" and appearing "successful." Her oral history suggests that some college-age women internalize the "superwoman" ideal and this, in part, prevents them from seeking help when they need it. The oral history storytelling process was a critical space for her to name this problem—"superwoman syndrome"—as opposed to having others label it for her.

Yearning for Control

Another pervasive theme throughout Claire's oral history is "control." Based on the vivid descriptions of her childhood that she narrated, we are able to start to see the process by which she developed a need for control in her life—so often, she had absolutely no control over the events that transpired, and she clung to moments in which she could attempt to control her life.

There were several critical events she was unable to control, which became "triggers" (which commonly bring on the onset of an eating disorder). These events include her parents' divorce, a major mistake her high school made which effectively delayed her process of attending college, and the passing away of several

loved ones in a short period of time. However, what she could control was her own body—and it was controlled to such a degree that she became very ill, not having menstruated for three years (at the time of the interviews). When talking about control and her body she noted:

> And I was just like, ok, well at least I can control my health. Even though I don't really have much I can do about this decision, and now looking back I can see that I did have a voice.

By "voice" Claire is referring to personal autonomy and control. It is in this point in the narration process that a paradox emerges as she talks about her parents putting pressure on her:

> And as soon as he said that, like as soon as people wanted me to do something, I didn't want to do it anymore. I was like, I don't want to do this.

The more familial pressure she seemed to live up to, the less autonomy she felt. The only way she could conceive to regain authority over her life was to ritualistically control her body.

Triggers in the form of "disappointments" were also a persistent theme in her story, which we believe is intimately connected to her feelings of self-worth. Claire measured self-worth largely by adhering to strict standards of perfectionism and maintaining autonomy. Due to the significant life markers we have noted, she often felt an overwhelming amount of disappointment. She focused heavily on familial disappointment, noting difficulties in her relationship with her father.

> It was really hard because I knew, that year I sensed that I couldn't depend on him. I never knew when he was gonna be there or if he was gonna be there. And I always felt stupid when I told people after school that 'oh my dad's picking me up' and then if they would come back for sports or whatever and I was still there, and they'd be like 'where's your dad' I'd be like, 'on his way.' You know, I mean it's just really hard.

The divorce of her parents, prior to which her father had an affair with someone she knew, was a significant disappointment

during which she felt powerless. Her mother became severely depressed, and during visits home from college Claire was left to deal with that emotional burden because her two older sisters lived away from home. She felt emotionally drained and that she had been cut a raw deal. Although she stated that she did not want to live in the shadow of her sisters, she had expected to grow up living in similar economic and familial conditions. Unfortunately, with the divorce of her parents came economic difficulty that required her to seek financial aid for college, which her sisters hadn't needed. For someone who wanted to be older, like her sisters, she wasn't dealt the cards she anticipated. Claire stated:

> It was really funny because at the time I didn't really think anything of it because I was always like, I'll have my day kind of thing. That would be me some day, and I'll be able to come home and everything. And it wasn't really until I was in college, and by that point in time my parents were divorced and we had lost another house and you know dadadadada, that, I never got that shot. I was the one responsible for financial aid whereas my sisters, you know my parents had really helped put them through school. I had never got the chance to bring my friends home from school to see my parents. I never got to go back to the same home that I grew up in. I never got all of those things. I didn't really understand it. It was it wasn't until six years down the line when I got to the point where things quote unquote should have been good for me.

Claire emphatically explained that she felt alienated from her past—she could not return to the place where she grew up, nor could she visit with any of her childhood friends. She felt alienated from her father, worried for her mother, and envious that her sisters already had their adult lives in place. This sense of dislocation, combined with a newfound anxiety over financial issues, resulted in not only a heightened sense of disappointment, but also the desire to regain authority in her life—a recurring theme.

Autonomy as a Central Value

Claire frequently discussed "independence," and the related concepts of intelligence and maturity, which she believed were important traits to have. Accordingly, she pushed herself to appear older and wiser than other children her age. To Claire, being seen as wiser or more mature was a part of a value system by which she constantly judged herself; she believed that maturity was the sign of productivity, and thus value.

Claire excelled as a student, which gave her confidence during difficult times. Although she knew her parents were unhappy, she desperately wanted their approval, and as a result she often acted as the mediator between them after the dissolution of their marriage. Because she was put in such an emotionally taxing position, and had perfectionist tendencies, she exerted herself physically and mentally to succeed in both academics and athletics. Here we can see how the body, even if peripherally, began to take on some of the focus of her perfectionism.

To Claire, being mature was an important aspect of her personality. Often she stated how much she enjoyed being around older people:

> I mean, I guess I always grew up wanting to do things older because I never wanted to be thought of as young. I was always worried 'would they think this is silly' or whatever.

Not only did she want to be mature in her own right, but she also wanted others to know that she was mature.

This desire for maturity, combined with academic excellence, led her to believe that she was independent and did not need to rely on others. This is interesting partly because she often looked for others to take care of her during difficult times. Even after she categorized herself in the role of a mother in her own daughter–mother relationship, at times she still looked to her mother to protect and comfort her. This is evidenced when she discussed her mother forcing her to join an eating disorder therapy group.

> And I remember just screaming and being like "mom, I may be skinny, I'm not crazy, I'm not psycho, please do

> not leave me here." I mean I was begging and my mom was just like, absolutely not. She did the mother hen thing, scooped me out of there, put me in the car, she's like, "you just need some chicken soup, we'll take care of you, you need your own bed, everything will be great."

To Claire, having her mother assume responsibility in the form of an authoritative figure not only relieved her of the stress she had been dealing with, but it also gave her the chance to take a step back from the strict control she was exerting over her body that was destroying her life.

A Web of Pressures: Look at Me, I'm Shrinking

Looking at the internal and external pressures on this woman, within the context of a value system that emphasizes perfectionism, control, and autonomy (often conflicting values), we can begin to understand the web of pressures and attitudes Claire responded to via her body. The selection of a coping strategy that would quickly distort her physical body is also important because Claire was deeply concerned with how she projected herself to others. "Projection of self" is similar to the metaphor of the mask. It involves the individual appearing to be a certain way outwardly, while concealing many inner problems or insecurities (Monte, 1999). An individual may choose to don certain masks in particular situations to mold themselves into the appropriate personality that could handle such circumstances. Similarly, Cooley's (1922) "looking-glass self" theory posits that individuals imagine how others see them, and their perception impacts their self-concept and behaviors in order to be seen in a way they deem desirable. In Claire's case, it was important to her to appear to others as mature, wise, and in control of herself. She frequently based her decisions on the difficult balance of pleasing herself and conforming to a notion of what others expect. She noted:

> I mean I loved the fact that they thought I was so cool for helping my mom, but I always wanted people to respect me, for what I ***could*** do and what I could say and what I thought, more than just being a tangent to someone else's life. Do you know what I mean?

Claire often spoke about how it was important for her to remain silent or invisible in the family, so as not to cause trouble by being who she was. For someone desperate for autonomy, this became a high-wire act. She wanted to be heard and to be silent, to be seen and to be invisible. A disorder which would grotesquely shrink her body is almost the logical response to such contradictory attitudes. In fact, some scholars explain that anorexia is the logical, albeit grotesque, response to a cultural context that pressures women to be hyper-thin (Bordo, 1998, 1993; Burmberg, 1982; Hesse-Biber, 2006; Kilbourne, 2000; Wolf, 1991). In effect, anorexia made her smaller and more noticeable simultaneously. She began to occupy less, and more, space in the social world and within her family.

> But when I weighed the pros and the cons, especially because I was always someone to keep the peace in my house, to disrupt a balance, or to make unnecessary trouble wasn't something I was willing to do.

Claire is exhibiting characteristic traits among many American women—the desire to silence themselves and to act as the peacemakers within the familial structure. We suggest trying to make sense of this within the larger sociocultural context in which women in the media are commonly depicted with their mouths covered or having a muted expression, as if more desirable in silence (Bordo, 1998, 1993; Burmberg, 1982; Kilbourne, 2000; Hesse-Biber, 1996, 2006; Wolf, 1991).

As you can see, the preceding example is an excerpt from an analytical write-up in which the report is organized around several major themes and in which the data are presented and discussed simultaneously. In the following brief example, I suggest how one might present the same data and discussion in two distinct sections of the report. In the example I review one theme "perfectionism" and then shift to the discussion of those findings; however, this is merely for illustrative purposes—in a full article each section would cover multiple themes.

Example 2: An Example of an Analytical Write-Up that Presents Research Findings and then Discussion

"Claire's Narrative: A Thematic Analysis"

Striving for Perfection

Claire explained that she always wanted to excel, and in fact, perform flawlessly. As such, perfectionism was a dominant theme in her narrative. Through this theme we can see internal and external pressures operating together, including familial pressures and a self-imposed longing to "succeed." When describing her experiences in middle school Claire stated:

> I always pushed myself harder than anyone else pushed me. I remember when I was in fifth grade my school had this special gifted program even above and beyond the ones that they already had for the classroom setting and it was an afterschool program.

Other statements Claire made concerning her attempt for perfectionism center on the high expectations she believed her parents had for her:

> I can remember calling my dad when I was in eighth grade and I got a B+ in calculus or something, I mean I don't even remember what it was. I remember being so bummed out and I was so scared to tell him and everything and he was like, well, you know, you'll just work harder next [time], you know, gives you something to shoot for, or whatever, but to me it was that I couldn't believe it, what I had missed. It wasn't that I got a B+. That was good it was I could have gotten an A. I should have worked harder, I could have done more you know? Um, so I was always kind of like that.

During one of the toughest times in her life, when she was battling anorexia nervosa, the same mentality emerged:

> I knew I needed help, but, the people who I kept seeing just didn't get it. They just didn't get it and they wanted to put me on all sorts of medications. I'm so antidrug, just

> because I still have this superwoman syndrome thing, that I can do it, I don't need help.

Here is an example of how the drive for perfectionism and self-reliance impacted Claire's perception of how to best deal with her eating disorder.

Discussion of Findings

Perfectionism was a major theme in Claire's oral history. Her perfectionist tendencies seem to have gendered dimensions. Moreover, there is a linkage between the gendered nature of her perfectionism and the ritualistic turn to her body as a site of perfectionism and control. Scholarly research suggests that many women who develop eating disorders at some point in their life often strive to be a "superwoman." This term is used to denote American cultural standards which suggest that women should be able to have a successful marriage/family and career, without struggle (Epstein, Seron, Oglensky, & Saute, 1998; Hesse-Biber & Carter, 2004; Hochschild & Machung, 1989). While Claire was not starting a family, she was faced with multiple situations in which she felt she had to be totally committed; she was devoted to her academics as well as to maintaining positive relationships within her family, and to "looking good" and appearing "successful." Her oral history suggests that some college-age women internalize the "superwoman" ideal and this, in part, prevents them from seeking help when they need it. The oral history storytelling process was a critical space for her to name this problem—"superwoman syndrome"—as opposed to having others label it for her.

Claire's oral history project revolved around the oral history of one woman. How would the data be presented if the same study had been conducted with multiple participants? Data from multiple participants would be used throughout the presentation of findings. There are different ways of accomplishing this. For example, in each section where a theme or code is reviewed, data may

come from any number of participants. Let' say we conducted the same study with 5 participants. For instance:

Perfectionism was a dominant theme in all five oral histories. Claire explained that she always wanted to excel, and in fact, perform flawlessly.

[Insert quote from Claire's transcript]

Other participants noted similar issues:

[Insert one or two representative quotes from other participants' transcripts]

Through the theme of perfectionism we can see internal and external pressures operating together. For three of the women there were significant familial pressures coupled with a self-imposed longing to "succeed." When describing her experiences in high school. Natalie stated:

[Insert quote from Natalie's transcript]

Claire had similar experiences in middle school:

[Insert quote from Claire's transcript]

The preceding is an example of how data from multiple participants might be represented. This is just an example; there are many ways to write up the data.

Let's look at a different kind of example from a published study.

Koleva (2009) conducted an oral history project with three Bulgarian Jewish women in one family. The intergenerational study, with a grandmother, mother and daughter ranging in age from 26—86, sought to examine the construction of Jewish identity-building within one family across generations. There is a historical context for the study, and thus the researcher explores the interplay of personal and collective memories as well as the (re)construction of cultural identity within a shifting sociopolitical context. After describing the historical background of the project, the methodology of the project, and the experience of interviewing each of the three women, Koleva presents her results across two major themes (followed by a substantive conclusion). The two organizing themes are: (1) generations in the family: transmission and solidarity, and (2) historical generations: the loss and reinvention of Jewishness. The following is her discussion of the first theme, and serves as another example of how to interweave the oral histories of three participants. This too is an example of an analytical write-up in which the presentation of findings and discussion of those findings are presented together.

Excerpt taken from Koleva (2009)

"Daughters' Stories: Family Memory and Generational Amnesia"

Generations in the family: transmission and solidarity

The importance of the family as a guardian of Jewish traditions and identity has been stressed by both researchers and members of the Jewish community (Georgieva). The family is the primary social framework of identity formation and the primary community of memory. Seen in this perspective, the three stories offer an opportunity to broach the question of intergenerational transmission. My approach to them is inspired by Daniel Bertaux's method of "social genealogies" (Bertaux & Thompson, 1997) and by the project he and a group of Russian sociologists carried out in the mid-1990s in Russia on the ways families managed (or failed) to preserve and hand over to younger generations their "cultural capital" after the 1917 revolution (Semenova, Foteeva, & Bertaux, 1996). However, while Bertaux and the Russian colleagues were interested primarily in the social contexts and their impact on the individual life paths, I will focus on the symbolic and ideological resources for identity construction, and on the intergenerational continuities and discontinuities of self-identity in times of abrupt social changes such as the socialist and postsocialist transitions.

Assuming that the sequence of generations is about continuity and conflict, I am turning to the three women's utterances which throw some light on the intergenerational relations in the family. Adela spoke affectionately and respectfully of her parents, alternating the account of their habits at home on the eve of Sabbath with her own reflections about their influences on herself: her mother taught her all practical skills and her father, who was "very eloquent" and "well respected in the town," bequeathed his spiritual attitudes:

> He brought us up spiritually with his example. My mother, on the other hand, educated us with her example in the home. Laziness did not exist as a concept for her. Till her very last day she could not understand what it

> means . . . [. . .] And my father . . . used every occasion to educate us with stories and proverbs. [. . .] Spiritually, I take after my father. My mother taught me to work, to work a lot. But in terms of worldview, as a person, I take after my father. He would tell us these stories and we'd put on the table whatever food we had. [. . .] He really loved telling us tales. That's how he taught us integrity and compassion, and also keeping to Jewishness, and taking care of the reputation of the Jews. (Daskalova, 2004, pp. 17–19)

Jewishness in Adela's understanding is more than religion: it seems to embrace traditions, community, and a kind of moral stamina that she associates with Jewish identity. According to Adela, her father was "not religious at all" even though he performed the daily rituals, observed the Sabbath, and went to the synagogue on religious feasts. Having given up identification with Judaism quite early in life under the influence of Hashomer Hatzair, and having later joined the Bulgarian Communist party, Adela may well underestimate her father's religiosity in thinking of him as an intellectual ally, and willing to see only his wisdom, moral integrity, and loyalty to the Jewish tradition.

Interestingly enough, a similar intellectual proximity between father and daughter seems to have existed in Adela's own family. Her daughter Nadezhda admitted to having been "spiritually" closer to her father:

> My mother is very strong minded, and I suppose she influenced my personality a lot in everyday matters. She was very active in our education, even too active. She was a controlling, strong person, who had not had the chance to express herself through a professional career. [. . .] Maybe in contrast to her hyperactivity, dad was quiet, calm, and closed in. Spiritually, I felt much better with him. Maybe he influenced that part of me. So, to sum it up, for everything related to being organized, being orderly, for all these everyday life issues, the influence of my mother has been decisive, while with my father I remained spiritually closer. (Daskalova, 2004, p. 31)

Nadezhda admitted to having hated the "absolute order" that reigned in her parents' home, though she had unwillingly carried a lot of it over to her own home. Contrasting her parents' home to that of her friend at school, she found the former "quite depressing"—she did not like the furniture, the clothes her parents used to wear, the manner in which they used to behave. Her mother did not seem to be aware of that, or maybe did not attach much importance to it. In Adela's narrative, all tensions and conflicts seemed to find a peaceful resolution, and there was an essential continuity in the "destinies" of successive generations of women.

In her turn, Katya, who had spent a few years of her childhood with her grandmother, remembered her as a grassroots activist:

> I remember that a lot of women got together in the local branch of the Fatherland Front and I went with her. She also kept the books for our apartment building, she did all kinds of things. She was very active. From time to time, she took me to some awards ceremonies that she had organized, in some halls, with some medals. She was always organizing things, she even tried to order us around the home. [. . .] she always exuded this strong spirit of the communist activist, with her grey skirt, the blouse, her tidiness, etc. And I imagine she must have looked exactly like the activists of [the] Hashomer Hatzair movement . . . I think of her as an aged copy of what she used to be in her youth. (Daskalova, 2004, pp. 43–44)

Katya's narrative of her mother was more complex and reflexive:

> When I was younger, I don't know why, but somehow in my mind, my mother was more or less marginal. Things actually changed for the first time, that is, we started getting closer, when we moved to our own flat. That was the first serious trial for me. (Daskalova, 2004, p. 45)

An even more serious trial was their stay in Israel, where each of them led her own struggle apart from the other and was

unable to rely on each other's help: Nadezhda was constantly at work, while Katya struggled to learn the language, to integrate, and to form herself "as a person." Both of them did the impossible, as she stated in her talk, at the cost of drifting away from one another:

> Because at that time my mother and I were already becoming quite alienated. She was struggling very hard at the time. And she did well, she managed to achieve things people dream about. At the very first attempt she passed the medical exams and started working in the largest hospital of Tel Aviv. [. . .] so she was constantly at work and she was almost like a zombie. We didn't have anything to say to each other. She didn't have her own circle of friends there, she was very isolated, while I had my circle, we drifted really far apart, really far (Daskalova, 2004, p. 49). [. . .] Now that I am older, I realize that the years go by and it's much harder for me to accept this, and I am much more sensitive to her situation, you know, that she is alone. And especially on holidays I've often thought that if I have to, I'd stay at home because of that. [. . .] I have to do it, because I feel that unfortunately, since we are both women, we need to support each other, simply because it is only the two of us (Daskalova, 2004, p. 54).

At these moments of the interview, Katya was more appreciative of her mother's achievements and showed more understanding for her situation than the two elder women seemed to show in respect to their mothers. Certainly, she may not have reasoned like this in a different conversation, when questions of women's situation were not so central. Even without this statement of gender solidarity and emotional bonds between generations, however, it is clear that there are important continuities within the family: self-reliance, holding education in high esteem, seeking intellectual challenges, regarding work as self-fulfillment. Nadezhda spoke most readily about her profession and her work. Adela was proud about her university education. Katya admired her mother's professional success in Israel;

she herself had begun working on a Ph.D. thesis. The three women shared a disposition to cope with their lives alone, not relying on their partners. They also had shared interests in literature and a common way of spending their free time: reading. Neither of them talked about the conflicts in the family: they only mentioned the "nightmare" of "three families, four generations" living in one apartment before Adela decided to sell it and buy smaller, separate ones. They (particularly the two elder women) stated that it was disastrous for their mutual relations but neither of them expanded on that topic. All three preferred to demonstrate that mutual help, care, and respect existed in the family. None of them mentioned any predecessor beyond the ones they had directly interacted with. Thus, for all of them, family was more of an alliance rather than filiation. Nevertheless, the relations between generations seem to be no less important than the intragenerational ones. A number of basic orientations and dispositions have been transmitted between generations. To a certain extent, the daughters have acquired experience and attitudes from their mothers and have integrated them in their own life expectations. Using Bourdieu's concept, we could conclude that the three generations have kept and successfully transmitted the "cultural capital" of the family. Thus, the family appears as a community with its inherent tensions, but one that has been held together by a distinct "familial culture" more or less shared by the three generations.

The intergenerational moral economy of the family looks, however, quite different as far as Jewish identity is concerned. If, in relation to their life strategies, the three women seem to belong to a shared world, their perceptions of their ethnicity make them inhabit divided worlds—and this is where societal generations come into the picture.

As you can see in the preceding example, interweaving the oral history interviews of multiple participants and discussing them in relation to each other, as well as in relation to a larger topic of identity building, is an effective strategy in some projects.

Impressionistic Writing

The term *impressionistic tales* was developed by Van Maanen (1988) in his classic work on writing ethnography. I, however, am using the idea of impressionism more broadly to encompass a wide range of "creative" approaches to representing oral history research, now available to social science researchers. Therefore, I use the term *impressionistic writing* instead of *impressionistic tales*.

Impressionistic approaches to writing focus on the researcher as a storyteller. When emphasizing one's role as a storyteller, the questions then become:

- What story (or stories) do I seek to tell?
- How can I tell this story (or these stories) effectively, vividly, persuasively, meaningfully, and truthfully? How can I give them texture, feeling, and tone?

Storytelling has an artistic quality. Therefore, impressionistic writing is an artful and creative process. Impressionistic writing uses language richly in order to convey the oral history data. With an emphasis on language, impressionistic writing may adopt the tenets of fiction, although the writing is grounded in the oral history data. In this vein, impressionistic writing uses imagery, metaphor, texture, color, juxtaposition, narrative/story, plot, and drama in order to create compelling and multilayered renderings of the oral history experience. With the rise in narrative inquiry in the qualitative paradigm, more and more social science researchers conducting oral history research turn to impressionistic forms of writing. Although the literature sometimes refers to these forms of writing as "alternative" and the like, these terms may have the implicit effect of illegitimating these approaches to the write-up. So, while analytical approaches to the oral history write-up are arguably "traditional," both analytical and impressionistic approaches to writing are valid and important ways of writing up oral history research.

Impressionistic writing does not follow the rough template that analytical writing tends to follow. Rather, impressionistic writing—which, again, can be done in many different ways—often merges methodological discussions, research findings, and discussion of findings into a narrative piece. So, for example, the write-up may be presented in story format, focusing on a rich description of the

research participants and their stories. A methodological discussion or discussion of the "project" may appear prior to the narrative, as an epilogue to the narrative, or may be interwoven into the narrative (so that the researcher's role in co-creating the data is explicit).

Beyond narrative forms (appearing as articles or essays) impressionistic approaches to oral history write-up may draw upon many arts-based forms, including but not limited to: sets of poetry, short stories, novels, dramatic scripts, documentary films, visual art, and so forth (see Leavy, 2009 for a full discussion of arts-based research). Moreover, any of these forms may be combined. So for example, a more "traditional" analytic write-up may also include research poems. These poems may be created out of the participants' exact language, out of the participant and researcher language, or may also include ideas from the literature review. Each of these forms has different considerations. For example, dramatic scripts require attention to characterization, plotting, storylining, dialogue, monologue, setting, costuming, and props (which may be based on photographs or other objects collected or reviewed during interviews; see Saldaña, 1999, for a full discussion of dramatic script writing in qualitative research).

As you can see, impressionistic approaches to writing vary considerably in style and form, and there are no templates to follow. Accordingly, it is difficult to present an example. The following example should be taken merely as one way to approach an oral history write-up, and not as a "representative" example. I have chosen an example from Mary Chamberlain (2009) because she has been at the forefront of oral history research for over three decades. I have also selected this piece because the subject matter merges many of the strengths of oral history research: attention to process, micro–macro linkages, working with a "community" in terms of shared identity, and attention to social/historical context. Her approach in the excerpted piece that follows weaves oral history interviews together with theory, empirical research, literature, historical context, and researcher reflections. It is written as one uninterrupted narrative. She prefaces the running narrative with the following abstract:

> Can we talk of a collective, diasporic memory? I will argue that in the case of the African-Caribbean community, there

are distinctive features—such as the need to tell and the need to connect—which suggest that this diasporic memory is framed through identifiable cultural templates, which distinguish it from the memories of migrants.

(Chamberlain, 2009, p. 177)

Excerpt taken from Mary Chamberlain (2009)

[Please note I have significantly edited this piece for space constraints and acknowledge possible changes in meaning.]

"Diasporic Memories: Community, Individuality, and Creativity—a Life Stories Perspective"

> "We can remember only thanks to the fact that somebody has remembered before us, that other people in the past have challenged death and terror on the basis of their memory. Remembering has to be conceived as a highly inter-subjective relationship." (Passerini, 2005)

Luisa Passerini's haunting words on memory and totalitarianism offer insights into another, far older, and longer lasting regime. For three centuries, between eleven and eighteen million Africans were wrenched from their homelands to labor in the plantations of the New World. The regimes which emerged attempted, deliberately, to dehumanize the slaves, to destroy any vestiges of culture and family organization, and to create a social order based on race and color. Race and color demarcated free from enslaved, and involved an elaborate ideology of superiority and inferiority to the extent that this not only permeated every social relationship, but also was perceived as "natural." White planter rule was total and hegemonic. In the process, slave memories became bifurcated. This short article attempts to grapple with these issues. Its central argument is that in the case of the Caribbean, individual memories still contain traces of the central problematic of collective memory. These traces can be found partly in the substance of the memory, partly in

the manner of their recollection. These traces, I argue, constitute what we might term "diasporic memory," ways in which the past, and people in the past, challenged, in Passerini's words, "death and terror". . .

The Caribbeans' long migratory history—not only to, but also from, the region—places it in the vanguard of the African diaspora and diasporic ways of thinking. African peoples may have been forcibly dispersed to the region, but West Indians migrated from it as soon as they could, taking with them distinctive Creole ways of philosophizing and behaving. It was, for instance, Caribbean intellectuals and activists in the twentieth century—Sylvester Williams, Marcus Garvey, George Padmore, among others, migrants all—who set the scene for Pan-Africanism (becoming, for some, the spiritual home of the African diaspora) in its various historic and contemporary guises . . . .

For, resonating in individual, African-Caribbean memories are the echoes of collective trauma and the persistence of shame which present themselves in compulsive and often compelling ways.

Let me start. Ursula was born in Barbados in 1938. She left Barbados in 1959 and returned in 1976. Ursula's father, a carpenter, emigrated to Curaçao when she was a child, returning every three years. His remittances paid for her secondary education—at the time, something very rare for black Barbadians. Ursula's agenda contained one item: difference. Everything that she had done—her migration history, the man she married, her employment patterns, and so forth, were all "different" from that of other migrants. Her father's migration, her status as a singleton child (she was her mother's only child), her relatively privileged background—certainly one which included a secondary education—may account for this sense of difference. But it is not how *she* explains this. Her explanation is very different. "My mother," she says "was mulatto."

> My grandmother remembers her father was white . . . so naturally, my mother still had a very strong high color . . . so I was of a lighter complexion. People tell me that I still have certain features that show I am [partly white] . . . my grandmother had actually grown up on the plantation . . . [and] looked more to the white race than the black.

Although her grandmother's sister had "married back into white," her grandmother had "married to a colored person." This grandfather, a tailor, migrated to Panama.

> My grandmother said that he did not stay for long because he was not the laborer type of person . . . being very soft . . . he couldn't work as hard as the others, he wasn't used to it.

Race was the leit motif of her life. The story of the ancestry was told in the opening stages of her interview. It continued to dominate her narrative. She was the daughter and granddaughter of migrant workers. What appeared to be important was not the absence of her father in her childhood but that her father provided the means for her family—and Ursula in particular—to live out the life of difference which, as light-skinned people, Ursula considered their entitled inheritance and which her grandmother wished to convey by stressing, and practicing, difference. "I suppose having all this for me, I was special." This was something her grandfather had failed to achieve for her grandmother and mother in Panama. He was "too soft." In one stroke—repeating her grandmother's story—she both dismissed his attempts and explained it by elevating his status. He was not a natural laborer, not like the other Panama migrants who—it is implied—were poor, black working class men. For, unlike her grandmother's sister who had married a white man, it was her grandmother's "lot" to marry someone who was "a colored person, and brought her here, on this very estate."

Why this compulsion to differentiate herself through race? For an explanation, let me turn to the Barbadian novelist, George Lamming [. . .]

We can find comparable scenarios throughout the literature. Karen Fog Olwig, for instance, in her superb new study, *Caribbean Journeys: An Ethnography of Migration and Home in Three Family Networks* (Olwig, 2007) introduces us to the Muir family of Jamaica—a family which, too, emphasizes its "white" heritage, even though emanating from one of the earliest free black villages in postemancipation Jamaica . Similarly, Paul Thompson and Elaine Bauer in their recent book, *Jamaican Hands*

Across the Atlantic (Bauer & Thompson, 2006) report that their interviewees similarly stress, where possible, their mixed-race origins, highlighting—like the Muir family, like Ursula—the white, rather than the black, ancestry, or alternatively highlighted ancestors who were either free blacks or maroons.

In the case of Jasper and his mother, whom I interviewed for an earlier project, they emphasized in their life stories that they were not plantation people, that is, agricultural laborers and therefore all that encoded in terms of a slave ancestry. Jasper's great, great-grandmother, he assured me, "never worked *in* a plantation . . . She used to work *at* Wiltshire's plantation . . ." (Chamberlain, 2004). Stories such as these provided alternatives to an origin in slavery, even though all versions of the story were, of course, dependent on it for their meanings. Is this how we might uncover a collective memory, reflecting the composition and endorsement of a joint script? In the case of the Caribbean, is the collective memory this ultimate one: the "forgetting" of the past in slavery? It is a voided memory, camouflaged with other narratives. It is the memory that dare not say its name.

Let me move on to another diasporic narrative, this time a more consoling one. There are many in the narratives of West Indians—what I term "cultural templates," the imaginative structures which shape and articulate memory and act also as a cognitive shorthand for a set of social values, prescriptions for appropriate behavior, and membership of a very particular diasporic community. Avis was born in Barbados in 1940.

> . . . my Mum has always been a wonderful woman . . . I remember her as being very beautiful and with long hair and we always used to be sitting down playing with it . . . my mum used to make us know every cousin, brother, uncle, distant, whether it was fourth, third, sixth. She used to tell us who had how many sons, what daughters, what children, who they were, where they lived . . . I can still remember all the generations . . . my grandmother was very beautiful . . . [and] my great-grandmother . . . when [my grandmother] died I was ten . . . and people . . . say "Oh, she's going to come back" . . . because she loved

> me so much and I remembered, when she died, they passed me over the coffin, underneath again, saying that that'll keep them away from you . . . It is said that when they love you they come back and take you. So they pass me over the coffin, and under. They lift me up, say "Where is Avis? Where is Avis? Avis, Avis, come here." Up over the coffin and under again.

References to spirits and spiritual metaphors were a recurring theme in West Indian narratives. Both old and young talk of themselves as "spiritual" people. Family members were often described in religious terms, mothers and grandmothers, in particular, as "saints," "angels," and "blessed." These metaphors of Christianity ran in parallel with other metaphors, of duppies (ghosts) and the spirit of the dead, of the dead taking or inhabiting the living, a reverence for the "old ancestant," an abiding trust in kinship, and a powerful sense of identification and belonging. "When you are looking at me," another woman said, "you're looking at my mother." "I was never lonely" another informant remarked (about her migration to England), "I carried my family within me." "I was a grandmother child," a Barbadian woman born in 1950 told me, "My grandmother was everything to me. I can feel her presence even now." "We were all full of my grandmother," the Canadian-Trinidadian Dionne Brand wrote in her autobiographical short story, "Photograph." "She had left us full and empty of her" (Brand, 1989).

These were all migrant women who left behind family and kin in the West Indies. At one level, their individual memories contain the—often agonizing—experiences associated with migration: leaving children and loved ones behind, experiencing loneliness and alienation overseas, encountering racism and prejudice in the host environment. At another level, reading for the symbolic reveals (through the choice of language, or the repetitions) how lineage was embedded in the frameworks of family memory: the tangible links between the dead and their descendants, of ancestral rebirth, belonging, and continuity (see Chanfrault-Duchet, 2000; Anderson & Jack, 1991). Such ideas

permitted the past to inhabit the present, and the collective to inhabit the individual. Death and birth were not interruptions to the life course but continuities, a migration of the "soul" through the generations [. . .]

Memories illuminate the migrant experience, but they also provide us with insights into the ways in which individual memories are framed by these cultural templates, the narratives, and genres through which people understand themselves and present themselves to the world. Black West Indian experience is, perhaps, a very particular experience, for the idea of migration as continuity is prefigured by the model of family. If family renewal is seen in terms of the transmigration of the generations, there is no difficulty in seeing migration in terms of continuities, rather than rupture—beyond, of course, that initial rupture of the middle passage. Memories of lineage and descent in the narratives of West Indian migrants work as engines of connection, emphasizing global linkages, of families united by lineage and communities who speak the same normative shorthand, whose memories are structured through shared frameworks. West Indian migrants do not see themselves as destabilized, nor migration as an interruption in a life or a cultural narrative. On the contrary, the replication of memories, the commonality of the narrative, links the black experience and provides a cultural continuity with those back home and in the diaspora [. . .]

Clearly, memories are all unique and personal, each an account of the individual's life course from childhood to maturity, of the transformations from a Caribbean village to a migrant in a busy metropolis, and of the fictionalizing process inherent in the construction of a narrative of self. Memories are a key route into revealing and understanding the processes, adjustments, and negotiations of migrants, of the mobile and liminal worlds they inhabit, of the connections with and the longings for home. But they also contain those all-important traces from an older past, those deeper levels of values, attitudes, and behaviors, clues to a collective memory. Diasporic memory is a necessarily layered one which links the black experience and provides a cultural continuity with those back home and overseas.

> For a community with a tenuous hold on the white narrative of modernity, this is an important asset. Even though slavery is, now, openly acknowledged and talked about and constitutes part of the educational curriculum, and the former denials and amnesia which surrounded it relegated to memory (or not—is there a denial of a denial emerging here?), memories and their traces have a tenacity which can be detected in unexpected ways. The individual memories of families recounted here contain within them codes for connecting within the diaspora, and to its brutal and totalizing history.

Again, the preceding is but one way to approach impressionistic writing. In the Chamberlain example, meaning is built through the juxtaposition of different materials (texts), which are layered and woven together. The possibilities with impressionistic writing are vast. Bear in mind the goal is to paint a multidimensional picture in which a story is communicated about the experiences of individuals within, and in relation to, a larger group or larger critical issues about social reality. The picture you paint always seeks to inform and may also persuade, provoke, reveal, illuminate, challenge, and touch readers.

Note

1 This is excerpted from Leavy, P., & Ross, L. S. (2006). The matrix of eating disorder vulnerability: Oral history and the link between social and personal problems. *Oral History Review, 33*(1), 65–81.

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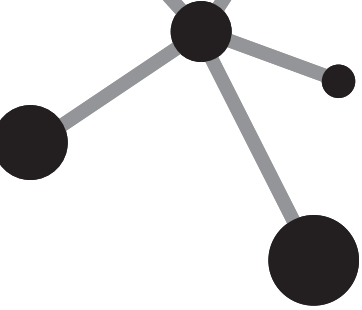


5

DISCUSSION: CONCEPTS AND STRATEGIES FOR EVALUATING ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH

WHEN WRITING up an oral history project the overall goal is to produce a valid, credible, trustworthy, and useful piece of research. When trying to understand and judge oral history as a qualitative practice, it is important to use appropriate evaluative concepts. Oral history research should be judged in its own terms. Many of the most common evaluative concepts researchers turn to originally developed from a positivist perspective in the quantitative paradigm, such as validity, reliability, and generalizability. Accordingly, they have been re-imagined, revised, redefined and sometimes renamed or replaced. In this regard, Sinner et al. (2006) note a move away from "rigor" towards "vigor" (although not all share in this contention). Additional concepts appropriate for evaluating qualitative research, such as authenticity, trustworthiness, vividness, and reflexivity have also been developed and continue to be refined in relation to oral history practice.

While quantitative evaluative concepts are grounded in stringent applications of objectivity and neutrality, qualitative research can be evaluated in many different ways. In fact, there is a long and complex history of qualitative researchers challenging the truth claims made under the rubric of scientific objectivity. Qualitative

approaches to social inquiry acknowledge and value the ways in which subjectivity comes to bear on the research process. Pelias (2004) speaks to this issue while articulating his suggestion that all research, in fact, presents first-person narratives. He writes:

> "Some would object. To say all research is first-person narrative is not to say that all research is about the heart. The heart pushes itself forward to places it doesn't belong.
>
> And I would respond: I don't want to go places where the heart is not welcome. Such places frighten me.
>
> Are you frightened by the truth? would come the rejoinder.
>
> No, I'm frightened by what poses as the truth." (Pelias, 2004, p. 8).

In a general sense, oral history research should be understood in terms of the particular project—both its aims and execution. If there is only one thing you bear in mind when reading an oral history write-up, it should be: What is the value of the work? There are many issues that must be addressed in order to determine the value of any particular project. These issues are fleshed out in this chapter. There are a range of evaluative concepts available to assist you as you determine the meaning and merit of an oral history project. There are also strategies that you, as a researcher, can employ in order to strengthen the value of the work as you conduct and represent your research.

For the remainder of this chapter I review a range of concepts appropriate for evaluating oral history research. Concurrently I present strategies you can employ in your own research in order to address each dimension on which oral history may be judged. As oral history projects vary greatly with respect to objectives, topical areas, scope, methodology, representational forms, and real-world applications, these evaluative tools and concepts are not benchmarks to hit but are rather a variety of strategies that can be used to make sense of the research. The extent to which particular tools and concepts are useful varies from project to project, but some meaningful combination should be sought.

I frame the following discussion in terms of questions that you can ask yourself when reading and evaluating a piece of oral

history research, or questions that you can ask yourself as you review your own oral history project.

Evaluation Concepts and Strategies

Explicitness

Can you clearly see what was done, why it was done, what was found, and how it was interpreted?

Oral history research is often understood in terms of the evaluative concept "*explicitness*" (see Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). Explicitness refers to whether or not a researcher has accounted for methodological strategies as well as the researcher's role in the project. This issue was discussed earlier in the book using the language of "the context of discovery" and "the context of justification." There are several areas about which oral history writers can be explicit, including topic selection, research design choices, data collection procedures, data analysis, and interpretation procedures. If you have been explicit in accounting for your methodological strategies, as well as your own role in the project, a reader would be able to answer the following questions:

- How did the researcher come to the topic? What is their interest, stake, or investment in the project? What was their overall purpose or objective entering into the oral history project?

Some of the issues that might be discussed in this regard are: relevant political commitments, social activist commitments or goals, epistemological grounding, personal connections to the topic, moral imperatives for researching the topic (such as documenting people's firsthand experiences for inclusion in a historical or public record), and other reasons for studying the topic.

- Are research design choices explicit?

There are several points that might be reviewed with respect to research design. First, what is the research purpose, and what are the guiding research questions? Are these clearly stated? An extension of the clarity and forthrightness of the research purpose statement and related questions has to do with the appropriateness of

the purpose and questions. There are two main issues here. First, does the formulation of the research purpose and research questions make sense? In other words, is there a tight fit between the research purpose and the research questions? Put differently, will answering the research questions as they have been posed actually address the research purpose? Second, what is the value of conducting a project with this research purpose, seeking to answer these research questions? In other words, is this a worthwhile project? Better put, for what is this project valuable?

Second, there is the issue of selecting the oral history method. Is it clear how the researcher came to select this method? Is the rationale for the use of this method provided or otherwise made clear? Does oral history strike you as an appropriate method in light of the topic, research purpose, and research questions? There should always be a tight fit between particular research objectives/questions and the method or methods selected to address those objectives/questions.

Third, there is the issue of sampling and recruiting appropriate participants. How were participants selected for the study? What is the overall makeup of the sample (for example how many participants were there, what are their major demographic features, and so forth)? How were participants recruited for participation in the study? Does this process seem reasonable and appropriate given the topic and goals of the study, as well as any practical or pragmatic issues that came into play (such as funding, geographic location, sensitivity of the topic, limited populations relevant to the topic, and so forth)? Has the researcher been explicit about her/his ethical practice? For example, was informed consent obtained, and was institutional review board approval obtained? Finally, what was the nature of any pre-interview interactions between the researcher and research participants?

Fourth, how, if at all, did a literature review help shape the research design process? A literature review is vital for adding multiple voices into a project, as well as helping to situate and shape an oral history project. When writing up a project, researchers should be explicit about the role of literature during all phases of the project including research design, data interpretation, and representation.

After reviewing the research design, you can look to the explicitness of data collection procedures.

- What did the data collection process entail? What was the interview process like, and how did it differ with different participants, if it did? Can you plainly see how data were generated? Is the researcher open and reflexive about their role in generating the data?

When reading an oral history write-up it is important to have a clear understanding of how the data were generated. The interview process itself is the heart of data generation, and therefore readers should be invited into that process. There are two main issues here, which really go hand in hand: (1) the nature of the interview conversations, and (2) the role of the researcher in the interview experience. The oral history write-up should give readers a window into the interview process: the kinds of topics covered, the flow of interviews, how interviews differed for different participants, and the active role of the researcher in the interview process. This can be accomplished in different ways. For example, sometimes researchers will include transcript excerpts that include both the researcher and participant voices. This gives a window into the kinds of questions and comments the participants were responding to, while also making visible the active role of the researcher in generating the interview data. Another way of accomplishing this is to provide a detailed description of the interview process, which may include the kinds of questions asked, how rapport was built, the extent to which different participants spoke freely and/or did not, participant narrative styles, and how the researcher felt during the different interviews. Transcript excerpts can be used to illustrate different speaking styles and the like.

The process of data analysis and interpretation should also be made clear.

- How were the data handled? What was the transcription and editing process? How were the data coded? How were memo notes generated? How were meanings derived/built out of the coded interview data? In short, can you see the process by which the data were analyzed and interpreted?

Oral history research is often evaluated based on the explicitness of the data analysis and interpretation processes. Therefore, it is important to address these issues in the final write-up. It is also important when conducting your oral history research that you employ strategies that lend credibility to your analysis and interpretation procedures. There are several strategies that can be employed in this regard (which are discussed in the section on *validity*).

Thoroughness and Congruence

Does the research project make sense? Is it a comprehensive project? Do the pieces fit together?

In addition to being explicit about what was done, why it was done, and what was found researchers must also make a case regarding the *thoroughness* of the project. Once readers have an understanding of how a project was conceived and carried out, they will then judge whether or not this was a reasonable approach. "Thoroughness" speaks to the comprehensiveness of a study as well as the exhaustiveness of sampling, data collection, and data presentation (Whittemore et al., 2001). As a part of this evaluation, readers will evaluate the thoroughness of the study by asking the following questions:

- Was a comprehensive and holistic approach to inquiry undertaken?
- Are the research questions thoroughly addressed by the data collection procedures?
- Are the research questions thoroughly answered?
- Is the sample appropriate?
  - Is the sample large enough for the particular project?
  - Does the sample represent the population in question thoroughly (i.e., people at different levels, different locations, diversity characteristics, differing experiences or perspectives, etc.)?
- Was data saturation reached?
- Is the oral history project well conceived?
- Does the methodology make sense?

- Is the presentation of ideas in the final write-up thorough and complete?

As a qualitative method, oral history is a comprehensive approach to social inquiry.

Another related concept when evaluating the design and execution of an oral history study is *congruence*. Congruence speaks to how the various components of the research project fit together. Is the oral history project well conceived? Does the methodology make sense?

> Congruence should be evident between the research question, the methods, and the findings; between data collection and analysis; between the current study and previous studies; and between the findings and practice. (Whittemore et al., 2001, p. 532)

Readers of oral history should be able to identify the interplay between the research questions posed and the method selected to answer those questions, as well as between the research questions posed and the ultimate research findings. In other words, did the research method adequately address the research questions? Are the results presented clearly, so that readers can see the link between research questions and research findings? In this vein, it is also useful to be clear about the relationship between the current project and the larger body of knowledge of which this study will be a part. In other words, how has previous research shaped the current study? How does the current study contribute to overall knowledge on this topic (either other oral history research or other research on this topical area)?

Even once a study has been conducted, the organization of the final write-up helps to establish congruence. If the results are well organized, it is easier to establish links between questions and methods, questions and conclusions, and the current study within the context of a larger body of literature. Chapters 3 and 4 offer guidance in this regard.

Ultimately, both thoroughness and congruence speak to the holistic nature of qualitative research in general, and oral history research in particular.

Ethical Practice

Were ethical guidelines followed? How does the researcher conceive of ethical practice in this study? Have participants been protected?

Oral history research in the social sciences is always viewed within the context of ethical decision making. Issues pertaining to ethical practice must be considered when addressing the larger question of whether you can clearly see what was done, why it was done, and what was found. In other words, another issue about which researchers must be "explicit" is the role of ethics in the research project. This too is a part of the kind of holistic practice reviewed with respect to thoroughness and congruence.

First and foremost, oral history research should follow informed consent guidelines. This includes attention to confidentiality, which readers will judge as they read the write-up. Informed consent has already been reviewed at some length; however, informed consent and anonymity are not the only ethical issues to consider. Overall, one must consider *disclosure*. This speaks to a range of concerns. For example, is the researcher's decision-making process clear? In the methodology write-up, does the researcher address both "the context of discovery" and "the context of justification"? Additionally, has the researcher disclosed his or her own role(s) in the research process? Has the researcher talked about his or her role in the data generation process, the process of interpretation, and the writing process? With respect to the writing process, does the researcher appear as a "ghost" in the write-up, or is their active role in data generation and interpretation clear? In other words, has the researcher dealt with the danger of "ghost writing"? This potential pitfall can be easily avoided by making sure that the researcher and participant voices are clear in the final write-up.

With respect to the role of the researcher, *reflexivity* is another key issue. Reflexivity involves constantly examining one's own position in the project, including one's assumptions, feelings, and so forth. Has the researcher engaged in an ongoing process of reflexivity? The issue is heightened when reading the interpretation of the research findings. Has the researcher allowed for, or in any way dealt with, alternative interpretations of the data? How has the researcher handled anomalous data? Have meanings been

closed off, or does the write-up allow for multiple meanings or multiple interpretations to emerge? Oral history research generally allows for the possibility of a multiplicity of meanings and avoids an authoritative voice. In this regard it is also important to consider the extent to which the participants' voices emerge in the write-up. Have their perspectives been emphasized? If the researcher used a narrative inquiry approach to their oral history analysis and write-up, did they present the meaning participants have for the events covered?

- Are micro–macro links explored? Is the research truthful to both the participants' narratives and the larger issues to which they speak?

Another key point to consider is the relationship between the participants' biographical experiences and the larger social issues or questions the research aims to address. Did the researcher make connections between the participants' micro-level experiences and these macro-level issues in meaningful way? This is often a key feature of oral history research in the social sciences: a great benefit of oral history research from a social science perspective is the capability to identify and explore micro–macro links. If this was a part of the project, has the researcher been successful in this regard? Has the researcher been able to convey both the particulars of the participants' stories and the larger issues to which the participants' experiences speak? Put differently, has the researcher pieced interviews together in order to address some larger critical questions about human experience? When writing about narrative research (an approach that some social scientists take to their oral history research), Polkinghorne (2007) writes:

> Narrative research issues claims about the meaning life events hold for people. It makes claims about how people understand situations, others, and themselves. Narrative researchers undertake their inquiries to have something to say to their readers about the human condition. (p. 476)

It is important to bear this in mind both when conducting oral history research and evaluating oral history research write-ups. Oftentimes the details of participants' stories become so interesting

that they can overwhelm the larger story of which they are part. It is like an impressionist painting in which all of the little dots of color may be beautiful in and of themselves; however, they must also be placed together in a way that the viewer can step back and see a bigger picture made up of the many smaller parts. So too is the case in oral history research. For example, in the body image study in which Claire participated, it was ethically important to be truthful to her particular story while also speaking to larger issues of body image issues among college-age women.

The importance of micro–macro links has to do with the usefulness of the research, which is an integral part of ethical practice. With respect to ethics it is also important to consider the real-world value of the research.

- Is the project useful? Is it worthwhile? What has the researcher done to maximize the usefulness of the project?

Oral history research is often judged by its potential benefits. This is something researchers should consider as they select a project. Some oral history projects might *benefit relevant groups, communities or the public more generally*. For example, are the research participants members of a group that could benefit from the research findings? For instance, are the oral history participants all engaged in the same occupation and if so, could the data be used to improve worker conditions? Or, are the research participants all members of a community that is grappling with development issues? Could the research be used to make suggestions for the development process that directly reflect the interests of the community members? For instance, an oral history project conducted with New Orleans residents might unearth implications for the rebuilding of New Orleans. Of course, these are just examples. Some oral history projects might have *social policy implications*. For example, an oral history project with September 11 survivors and family members might result in implications for the 9/11 memorial. If the research has the potential to benefit groups or to serve social policy decision making, has the researcher taken steps to ensure that this occurs?

Often, oral history projects center on *filling in the historical record*. In other words, these projects seek to document and preserve perspectives and experiences related to events and so

forth that have not previously been included in the public record. There are two main ethical standards by which this kind of research can be judged: archival and sampling.

With respect to archival, has the research been made available to the public? In addition to depositing oral histories into archives, many researchers are also creating Internet websites that the public can access in order to benefit from the information collected in oral history interviews. These measures also help to eliminate potential academic elitism with respect to accessing this social/historical information by making it available to the public at large.

With respect to sampling, if the aim is to fill in the historical record and document previously silenced perspectives, then it is very important to look at whether or not appropriate voices have been included in the project. For example, have disfranchised groups been sought out for inclusion? Have people with different perspectives on the event or topic been sought out for inclusion? Has the researcher been attentive to issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, nationality, or any other relevant status characteristics?

Linked to all of these ethical issues is the overarching concept of *sensitivity*. Showing sensitivity means that ethical practice has been made explicit (Whittemore et al., 2001). Research should serve the communities to which the research is relevant (Lincoln, 1995; Whittemore et al., 2001). In other words, oral history research in the social sciences should be, in some way, useful. Obviously, "usefulness" can be judged in many different ways and there is no cookie-cutter criterion. However, there is no doubt that oral history research should always show respect for participants and allow participants to maintain their dignity during both the data generation process and in the final representation (Lincoln, 1995; Whittemore et al., 2001).

Validity and Related Concepts

Is the research valid, credible, authentic and trustworthy? For what is the research valid, or in what ways is it valid?

When reading an oral history write-up, the question you must ask is: has the researcher made me feel confident about the research findings? At the end of the day, perhaps oral history research is

most judged by the extent to which it appears valid, credible, authentic, and trustworthy. Does it *feel* trustworthy? Do I have confidence in the methodology? Do I have confidence in the interpretive claims?

There are a range of important concepts to review that all "get at" the preceding questions. Before addressing the specific concepts in relation to oral history research, it is important to situate this discussion, however briefly, in its historical context. The concepts of validity, reliability, and generalizability are the cornerstones of how positivist research is evaluated. While these constructs can be very helpful in evaluating quantitative research, they are inappropriate, at least in their original conceptualizations, for evaluating qualitative research in general and oral history research in particular. It is important to understand that struggles over questions of how to strengthen knowledge claims and how to evaluate knowledge claims are not simply debates over terminology. These issues are power-laden. These issues center on how knowledge claims become legitimized or illegitimated, how knowledge claims become taken for granted or become contested, and how knowledge claims become trusted or suspect. In other words, the way in which we think about strengthening and evaluating research is inextricably bound to the way we formulate and apply "scientific standards" in order to give credence to some research and not to other research. Therefore, oral historians take issues of validity and the like very seriously. Aguinaldo (2004) writes insightfully on this issue:

> . . . the most heinous right wing movements have been premised upon the knowledge deemed "valid" even by research practices regarded as systematically rigorous and scientific . . . in moving away from foreclosure through binary oppositions, we change our validity questions from "is this valid research valid?" to "what is this research valid for?" Implicit within this reformulation are the ideas that (a.) validity is not a determination . . . but the process of interrogation and, (b.) this interrogation necessitates multiple and sometimes contradictory readings of the functions any particular research representation . . . can serve. Although there can be no conceptualization of validity that precludes the practice of

> power . . . we must conceive of validity that actively negotiates these practices and makes them known. (p. 130)

When thinking about how to strengthen your oral history project, or when evaluating an oral history project that you are reading, bear these concerns in mind. Oral history research does not exist outside of the social world but is rather an active part of it, including what becomes viewed as "truthful" and what does not. Oral history research often centers on the experiences of those who have been disenfranchised or left out of the historical record to date, and therefore these issues are even more pronounced.

In light of the inappropriateness of positivist conceptions of validity, reliability, and generalizability, qualitative researchers have re-imagined these concepts in order to properly evaluate qualitative research based on its own internal conditions and goals. Many qualitative researchers reject these terms outright, and instead have created new evaluative tools that "get at" similar concerns with respect to credibility, but in terms that are more appropriate to qualitative research. Accordingly, there is no one way to talk about how to evaluate oral history research, nor is there any way to please all of the researchers who grapple with these issues. In this section I attempt to present a range of concepts and strategies to consider, but I view them as malleable and I also view them as more or less appropriate for particular projects. In other words, these are personal decisions researchers must make as they create their projects. I begin with a conceptual discussion of the term *validity* (and the terms that have been developed to elaborate or replace the term *validity*) and then I move into a discussion of the strategies oral historians can employ in order to build validity and the like into their projects. I then move into discussions of reliability, generalizability, and related concepts.

Validity

As with most social science research, the primary concept used to evaluate oral history research is *validity* (and related constructs). The concept of validity speaks to the *credibility* of the research write-up. How credible is the research write-up? Are readers confident in the write-up? Is it persuasive? Are the interpretive claims

supported? Validity speaks to issues such as quality, rigor, and whether or not the researcher has established trustworthiness (Aguinaldo, 2004; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Golafshani, 2003). Koro-Ljunberg (2008) writes:

> It can be argued that the process of validation refers to the connection between findings and reality, and that reality cannot be separated from the subject. This means that research findings cannot be distinct from the subject or knower . . . and knowers cannot act as spectators in knowledge construction. (p. 986)

Oral historians in the social sciences acknowledge that they are active in knowledge construction. Therefore, standards for building credibility into a project, as well as standards for evaluating published projects, must be in accord with the tenets of oral history itself. In oral history write-ups researchers aim to create credible and authentic connections between the research findings and the aspect of social reality that is being studied; however, these connections are also context dependent. Maxwell (1992) has been at the forefront of theorizing about validity in qualitative research. He aptly writes: "Validity is not an inherent property of a particular method, but pertains to the data, accounts, or conclusions reached by using that method in a particular context for a particular purpose" (p. 284). In oral history research, full disclosure of the methodology as well as clear links between the research purpose, research questions, and research findings can go a long way towards achieving the context-dependent validity Maxwell writes of. Similarly, Cho and Trent (2006) suggest validity is a tool that can be used to examine the relationship between the research purpose, questions, and methodological processes in any given project. They too are highlighting the context-dependent or project-based nature of validity.

While the positivist conception of validity requires readers to determine whether or not research findings are valid, a qualitative perspective on validity differs. For example, researchers argue that there are degrees of validity, and urge consumers of qualitative research to examine the nature of the claims that are being made (see Polkinghorne, 2007). This view of "degrees of validity" with respect to the kinds of claims that are being made is based on the

contention that social science research presents an argument, and the goal is to persuade readers (Polkinghorne, 2007). Other qualitative researchers conceptualize validity as a process rather than an event or an outcome (see Aguinaldo, 2004). In this way, qualitative researchers understand that claims are not inherently valid or invalid but rather "validity is a function of intersubjective judgment" which means that validation is a process that occurs within a community (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 474). Similarly, some researchers employ the term *validation* instead of validity, in order to emphasize the process-oriented nature of confidence building in qualitative research (see Koro-Ljungberg, 2008). Moreover, the term *validation* highlights the role of the researcher within the research project (see Koro-Ljungberg, 2008), which is vital in oral history research in which the researcher is always viewed as active in the knowledge-building process.

> Researchers need to ponder how they will establish knowledge claims, prioritize data, connect with participants, use themselves as instruments of research, and communicate their findings to various audiences. In addition, it is crucial to portray validity and validation as possibilities and processes that enable scholars to establish various knowledge claims, rather than to execute an objective evaluation of truth or a demonstration of the researcher's fixation on transcendental truth. (Koro-Ljungberg, 2008, p. 988)

The emphasis on process versus outcome appears throughout the literature on qualitative research and validity. For example, in this regard Winter (2000) writes: "[validity is] a contingent construct inescapably grounded in the processes and intentions of particular research methodologies and projects" (p. 1). Similarly, Cho and Trent (2006) advocate a process-oriented view of validity as a part of holistic practice. As discussed throughout this book, oral history research is process oriented, and therefore a process-oriented view of validation/validity is congruent with the tenets of oral history. Moreover, I strongly advocate a holistic approach to oral history research practice.

Some researchers reject the term *validity* and use other terms to address these issues. For example, some qualitative researchers prefer the term *credibility* (see Agar, 1986). Other researchers

prefer the term *trustworthiness,* and view the validation process as a means of establishing trustworthiness (see Mishler, 1990, 2000; Seale, 1999). Golfshani (2003) writes: "[validity] is not a single, fixed or universal concept" (p. 602). Other researchers suggest that instead of using a concept like validity, qualitative research should rather be evaluated based on its ability to promote social action (see Sparkes, 2001). I discussed this earlier with respect to the ethical imperative for oral history research to serve a group, community, or the public at large.

There are many strategies that have been discussed throughout this book that oral historians can employ in order to build validity (confidence, credibility, trustworthiness) into their write-ups. To recap, it is vital that oral historians are transparent about their methodological decision making, including the context of discovery and the context of justification. It is also necessary to disclose one's position within the research project (which is a part of the context of discovery, but extends beyond it). Oral historians should also be clear about the value of their work: how it may be used and/or what it contributes to overall understanding about some critical issue or topic. Cho and Trent (2006) suggest that the write-up should reflect a process of "thinking out loud" so that readers can understand, holistically, how the research was conceived and carried out, and how interpretations of the data were developed (p. 327).

Consumers of oral history write-ups will most likely emphasize the manner in which interpretive claims are built and presented.

- How is the coded data used when making interpretive claims?
- What strategies have been employed during data interpretation?

In addition to the rigors of the coding process reviewed in Chapter 2, additional strategies can be employed during analysis and/or interpretation in order to add validity/credibility to the findings. These strategies include: analysis cycles, analysis teams, collaboration/"sharing authority", "reflection teams," triangulation, a literature review, and the use of theory (macro–micro levels of analysis). I briefly review each of these strategies, some of which have been discussed earlier in this book.

Oral history transcripts may be analyzed using analysis cycles (see Tenni et al., 2003). Similarly, researchers may employ a grounded theory approach to analysis (see Charmaz, 2008). In these instances, chunks of the interview data are collected and coded (analyzed), and the insights gleaned from this coding process then inform further data collection and/or data analysis. Cycles of analysis can also help a researcher to locate him- or herself in the project (Tenni et al., 2003), and thus this is a strategy for building systematic reflexivity into data analysis.

There are also several strategies for building collaboration into the analysis process. Analysis teams involve having multiple researchers analyze the data. This can achieve the evaluative standard of "intercoder reliability." In other words, if two or more researchers code the same data in the same way, the codes can be viewed as consistent. When differences emerge they can be negotiated. Sometimes in the literature, the term *reflection teams* is used (see Jones, 2006). Again, this involves having multiple researchers make sense out of the data, and may involve multiple researchers engaging in the interpretive process (the meaning-making process). Sometimes researchers collaborate with their research participants in order to analyze and/or interpret the data. When writing about this kind of collaboration in the oral history process, Frisch (1990) coined the term *sharing authority*. This can occur on a continuum, where researchers maintain varying levels of authority or control over the interpretive process. As oral history researchers attempt to emphasize participant perspectives, collaborative strategies of interpretations are, at times, useful.

Triangulation—the use of multiple data sources—can also be an effective method for building validity into oral history projects. Cresswell and Miller (2000) suggest triangulation is: "a validity procedure where researchers search for more convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study" (p. 126). The principles of triangulation can be used in different ways in an oral history project. For example, as discussed in Chapter 2, an oral history project might include any combination of the following: ethnographic observations, documents/photos/objects, and autoethnographic data. These sources of data can be used to confirm statements made in oral history interviews or to present alternative explanations, or to provide

context for the different statements made by different research participants, and so forth. These sources of data can also be used to strengthen or situate the researcher's interpretive claims. Oral history research may also include public documents such as census data, or journalistic accounts of events. These forms of data may be particularly useful in oral history projects about a historical or contemporary event, or a historical period in time, or a time of social change. Oral history research may also be a part of a multimethod project in which data may be collected in any number of ways, including focus group interviews, survey interviews, or any other data-collection methods used in social research. It is important in oral history research to note that when pieces of data are not "in sync" this does not mean one piece of data becomes privileged over on another, at least not necessarily. Rather, there can be valid reasons for why data may emerge from different perspectives. This is important and should be accounted for in the final representation, in order to paint a complex and nuanced picture of the aspect of social reality under investigation.

In this regard *criticality* is another evaluative concept that comes to bear on how an oral history write-up is judged. "Criticality" refers to the researcher's attention to anomalous data, alternative interpretations, reflexivity and the like (Whittemore et al., 2001). This is important whether or not a triangulated approach has been employed. A related concept is *integrity*, which refers to the extent to which a researcher has been self-critical; for example, the extent to which they have rechecked and challenged their interpretations (see Whittemore et al., 2001). The issue of integrity is particularly salient in oral history research, because readers are likely to prioritize factors such as trustworthiness and authenticity. It is important that in an oral history write-up the perspectives of the participants and the "feeling tones" come through. Readers need to be able to trust the researcher's instincts and his or her rendering of the process. Dealing with, instead of disregarding, anomalous data, and engaging with alternate interpretations of your data, can lend credibility to the write-up by addressing criticality and integrity.

Two more strategies that can be employed during data analysis and interpretation to build validity into the research are: (1) using a literature review, and (2) using theory explicitly. With respect to

a literature review, as noted throughout this book, literature is a way of bringing multiple voices into the write-up. It is important that during analysis and interpretation, multiple voices are brought into the project. Literature is also an appropriate way of situating the current study in relation to other studies. Theory can also be used explicitly during data analysis and interpretation, in different ways. For example, micro-level data, such as oral history interview data, can be analyzed using a macro theory. When this is done, data collected on the individual level is examined through the lens of a macro-level theory. For example, in the study of the experience of divorce for stay-at-home mothers, the micro-level interview data could be analyzed using feminist theories of identity building, sociological theories about marriage and family, and many other macro-level theories. In the body image study in which Claire participated, the micro-level oral history data was interpreted within the context of macro-level theories of body image development, women and work, and media consumption. Using literature and/or theory explicitly during data analysis and interpretation is particularly important in oral history research in the social sciences, in which micro–macro connections are so vital. When evaluating oral history research, readers may look to see if these connections have been made and if so, if they have been made effectively.

In sum, when thinking through "validity" issues I encourage you to consider these issues holistically and in context-specific ways. Consider how the various components of an oral history project fit together, and how the project is situated within a larger body of literature. Following Cho and Trent (2006), I suggest employing a bricolage of validity approaches in accord with the tenets of a specific oral history project. Use concepts that are appropriate for evaluating specific oral history projects which span a wide array of purposes and methodologies.

Reliability and Dependability

The evaluative concept of *reliability* developed in positivist research. Reliability examines the stability of research findings (Altheide & Johnson, 1994). Many researchers suggest that the concept of "reliability" has no place in qualitative research (for example, see

Golafshani, 2003; Stenbacka, 2001). Other qualitative researchers have reimagined the term *reliability* in order to make it useful for qualitative researchers. For example, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest the term *dependability* to get at similar concerns. Under this conceptualization the question becomes: is the data dependable? Other researchers use the term *consistency* (for example, see Clont, 1992; Seale, 1999). Therefore, the question becomes: is there consistency in the oral history data? Yet other qualitative researchers suggest that reliability is a consequence of validity, so demonstrating the latter establishes the former (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). For still other qualitative researchers, the term *trustworthiness* serves in the same capacity that the quantitative concepts of validity and reliability serve (see Mishler, 2000).

I suggest that although the term *reliability* will often appear in the literature, it really is an inappropriate benchmark for oral history research. It is important, however, that researchers establish *trustworthiness* in their oral history write-ups. Has the researcher presented the project and made knowledge claims in ways that resonate as trustworthy? As a part of this process it is important to consider consistencies and contradictions across the oral history data (that may be within one participant's story, or across participants). Do not be misled by this suggestion, however, as often inconsistencies, or what would appear as inconsistencies, are not signs that the data are invalid but are rather an important aspect of the data.

Generalizability, Transferability, and Vividness

The evaluative concept of *generalizability* also developed in positivist research. Under this conceptualization, generalizability refers to the ability to generalize the research findings from the sample studied to a larger population from which the sample was drawn. So, for example, if this conception was applied to an oral history project about September 11 survivors, then the ability to generalize would be the ability to make claims about a larger population of September 11 survivors (or disaster/trauma survivors, even) based on the oral history interviews conducted with a smaller sample of survivors. In positivist research, generalizability is seen as a strength of the research. Positivist understandings of generalizability do

not, however, translate properly to qualitative research. Oral history research should not be evaluated in these terms.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest the term *transferability* instead of generalizability. This concept speaks to the ability to transfer research findings from one context to another context.

> Generalizations are not found in nature; they are active creations of the mind. Empirically, they rest upon the generalizer's experience with a limited number of particulars, not with 'each and all' of the members of a 'class, kind, or order.' . . . That is to say, while generalizations are constrained by facts (especially if the facts are the particulars from which the generalization is induced), there is no single necessary generalization that *must* emerge to account for them. There are always (logically) multiple possible generalizations to account for any set of particulars, however extensive and inclusive they may be. (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, pp. 30–31)

They urge researchers to produce "thick descriptions" in order to be able to *transfer* conclusions from one case to another based on "fittingness." Lincoln and Guba (2000) explain as follows:

> The degree of *transferability* is a direct function of the *similarity* between the two contexts, what we shall call '*fittingness*.' Fittingness is defined as the degree of congruence between sending and receiving contexts. If Context *A* and Context *B* are 'sufficiently' congruent, then working hypotheses from the sending originating context may be applicable in the receiving context. (p. 40)

This is another example of how keeping a highly detailed audit trail of all methodological decision making, data collection procedures, and data analysis and interpretation procedures is so important. In order to be able to transfer research findings from one context to another, those contexts need to be described in great detail so that "fittingness" can be established. For example, if I seek to transfer the findings from the study of divorced stay-at-home mothers, from the sample of 12 women interviewed to a different or larger population, then I will need to be able to establish that the transfer of findings is appropriate. I will do this by describing, in a

highly detailed way, similarities between the participants and the population for which the findings are applicable.

Another evaluative concept qualitative researchers may use is *vividness*, which develops out of highly detailed descriptions that bring oral history readers into the project (see Whittemore et al., 2001). Although vividness is often discussed in relation to the creativity that qualitative writing requires, vividness is also a tool that can be used for establishing fittingness, and thus allowing for transferability. Vividness helps highlight the particulars, and thereby allows for determinations of fittingness and transferability. So, for example, in the body image study with Claire, writing a highly detailed and hence "vivid" description of Claire (her childhood, family structure, socioeconomic background, race and sexual orientation, interests, daily activities, aspirations) might allow me to determine when it is appropriate to transfer the research findings to other contexts.

I also suggest considering the term *usefulness* as you consider issues related to transferability. In oral history research it is important that critical questions are being asked that extend beyond the particulars of the individual interviews. In this respect it is appropriate to look at the extent to which an oral history project is useful in other contexts. In order for it to be useful beyond the bounds of the present study, the research findings must be applicable to other contexts or larger issues. This is another area in which the literature review can be a helpful strategy for connecting the present oral history project to a larger body of knowledge.

When thinking about issues of usefulness it is also important to consider how, if at all, the study makes micro–macro links. As consistently noted throughout this book, oral history research in the social sciences often attempts to link micro-level experiences to macro contexts. As noted, both literature and theory are useful in this regard.

"Craft"

Is the research well crafted? Has the researcher attended to the craft of oral history research? Is the methodology or project innovative (if appropriate)? Is the representation artful, evocative, and vivid? Does

the project create resonance, build empathy or understanding across differences, and/or raise critical consciousness?

Qualitative research is viewed as a craft, which means there is a creative, artful aspect to the research process. Moreover, as a craft, different researchers will engage in different processes even when using the same method. In other words, in qualitative research the researcher is an active and creative part of the research endeavor, and therefore different researchers will all put their particular stamps on their projects. Although historically there has been a science–art divide in the academy, qualitative researchers have long been exposing the artificiality of this binary conceptualization (see Leavy, 2009). In the social sciences, oral historians bring a sense of craft and their own sensibility to their research projects.

As oral history research is part of a tradition that views the research endeavor as a craft, some projects may necessitate innovation with respect to methodology and/or representational format.

When trying to determine if a project is well crafted, there are two main issues to consider. First, there is research design. This has already been discussed at some length. A well-crafted project is one that is well conceived, well designed, and well executed. In other words, an oral history project can be evaluated in part based on how it has been conceptualized, structured, and carried out. Readers can look to see how the researcher put the pieces together. In order for readers to understand how the project was crafted, the "context of discovery" and the "context of justification" need to be reviewed. Additionally, the analyzed data and interpretations of the data need to be clearly linked. All of these issues have already been reviewed.

Innovation is the second major issue to consider when examining how well crafted an oral history project is. Oral history research in practice, just as all qualitative approaches to research, can require malleability and innovation. Malleability is important because, most simply, things don't always go according to plan. In oral history research it is important to be open to modifying the methodology as necessitated by unexpected challenges and/or new information. For instance, in Chapter 3 in the example of divorce for stay-at-home mothers, the researcher had to modify her recruiting strategy because it simply wasn't working. In the

Koleva (2009) example on Jewish identity across three generations excerpted in Chapter 4, the researcher did not spend as much time interviewing the grandmother because of the difficulty in eliciting interview data. Another example comes from Botting's (2000) research on the experiences of female domestic servants who had migrated from coastal communities to a mill town in Newfoundland for employment in the 1920s and 1930s. This study was mentioned in Chapter 1. In order to meet her research objectives, Botting had to twice modify her project, ultimately including census data and other materials in a triangulated research approach. These are examples of the kinds of things that can happen in oral history research, all of which illustrate how important it is to remain flexible. Of course it is equally important to disclose these issues in the research write-up, so that readers have a clear understanding of how the research transpired. In this regard, Patton (1990) suggests that qualitative research should be creative, rigorous, and explicit.

Malleability is one of two ways in which innovation may emerge in an oral history project. The second centers on innovative approaches to oral history methodology or representation. Sometimes the research purpose you seek to explore, and the research questions you seek to answer, cannot be properly addressed by traditional approaches to oral history. Methodological innovation or methodological emergence can be necessary to address particular research questions (see Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2008 for a discussion of emergent methods). Likewise, sometimes a traditional analytical write-up is not the most appropriate format for relaying research findings in a particular project. In these instances a researcher may innovate and turn to an impressionistic write-up, and any number of narrative-based and arts-based approaches to representation (see Leavy, 2009). Researchers should always determine methodology and representational formats based on the particulars of the project at hand; this is a problem-centered approach to research (see Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). While these issues of innovation are not relevant to every oral history project, it is important to understand that methodological and representational innovation is necessary and/or desirable for some projects. In these cases, innovation should be regarded as a strength of the project.

> Flexibility amid common criteria provides the best assurance that the art of qualitative research will illuminate the science of qualitative research and the science will give credence to the art. (Whittemore et al., 2001, p. 523)

It is important to bear in mind that innovation is not an excuse for a lack of rigor but rather requires even more attention to issues of research design and methodological strategy, because in order to lend credibility to the findings, the researcher must demonstrate the appropriateness of the methodology. In this regard, Whittemore et al. (2001) write: "Elegant and innovative thinking can be balanced with reasonable claims, presentation of evidence, and the critical application of methods" (p. 527). Furthermore, creativity helps researchers discover the unknown, look at issues from new perspectives, and "get at" different aspects of the human condition (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2008, 2006; Leavy, 2009; Whittemore et al., 2001).

Another central component of "craft" is *artfulness*. The evaluative criterion of "artfulness" is complex and more or less pronounced in different oral history projects. An artful approach to oral history research can vary greatly. In one respect, artfulness may refer to the kind of methodological creativity just discussed. However, in a more general sense, attention to artfulness means that the researcher has been attentive to communicating the research findings in a clear and inviting way. In other words, the researcher has brought readers into the write-up and led them through it. Using simple language whenever possible, and writing in the first person are two strategies in this regard. Remember, an implicit if not explicit goal in oral history research in the social sciences is to create human connection and human understanding. In this regard, Sandelowski writes that the soul of qualitative research is "evocative, true to life, and meaningful portraits, stories, and landscapes of human experience" (1993, p.1 as quoted in Whittemore et al., 2001, p. 526). Oral history research is judged largely by its authenticity and trustworthiness, both of which are facilitated by the kind of writing Sandelowseki suggests.

In an analytical write-up, the quality of the writing also contributes to artfulness. Again, the most elegant write-ups are usually

the simplest. Elegant approaches to writing are able to be understood by broad audiences. In an impressionistic write-up, the quality of the writing and/or the aesthetic value of the representation contributes to the artfulness. An evaluative concept related to artfulness is vividness, which was discussed earlier. To recap, vividness refers to writing that provides readers rich detail and thick descriptions so that "vivid" pictures are created of the aspect of social reality being discussed. Issues to consider include:

- Does the write-up capture the feeling tones of the interviews?
- Does the write-up communicate mood?
- Is the write-up multidimensional? Is it textured and layered?
- Is the write-up evocative?
- Does the write-up create an emotional response from readers?
- Does the write-up build human connections? Is it relatable? Is it sensitive?
- Does the write-up resonate as truthful? Does it feel authentic?

Artfulness, creativity, and attention to the aesthetic value of the work can also be important in social justice oriented oral history projects. Oral historians are often working with disenfranchised or marginalized populations. Furthermore, a primary or secondary goal of most oral history research is to document firsthand experiences that would otherwise be rendered invisible in the public record. Additionally, many oral history projects revolve around accounting for the experiences of a "community" (a community bound by geographical location and/or a shared social characteristic). For these reasons and others, an artful approach to the writing of oral history research is important as researchers try to build powerful, persuasive, vivid, resonant, honest, dignified, and useful portrayals of their participants' experiences, and the possible connections between those experiences and the experiences of others. Some questions to ask include the following:

- Is the write-up provocative?
- Do the findings challenge, disrupt, or unsettle stereotypes?

- Do the findings promote empathy and understanding across differences?
- Does the write-up contribute to the development of critical consciousness in readers?

When considering the importance of artfulness in any particular write-up, always bear in mind the particulars of the oral history project. To what extent is "artfulness" congruent with the goals and presentation style of the project? To what extent does the epistemological, theoretical, or activist foundation of the study require attention to artfulness?

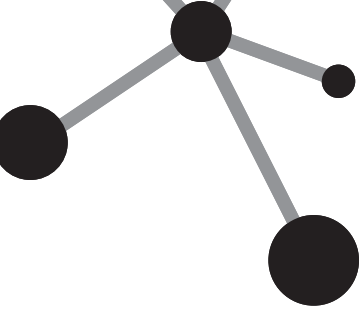
Concluding Thoughts

The process of evaluation is particularly thorny in qualitative research, and many of the reasons have been touched on. As you consider strategies for strengthening your own oral history project, or as you evaluate and try to make sense of the oral history projects you are reading, remember that it is important to use concepts that are appropriate to the tenets of oral history research in general, and the particular projects at hand. The following checklist recounts the major questions you can ask as you review your own oral history project or an oral history project that you are reading.

Checklist

- Can you clearly see what was done, why it was done, what was found, and how it was interpreted?
- Does the research project make sense? Is it a comprehensive project? Do the pieces fit together?
- Were ethical guidelines followed? How does the researcher conceive of ethical practice in this study? Have participants been protected?
- Is the research valid, credible, authentic and trustworthy? For what is the research valid, or in what ways is it valid?

- Is the research well crafted? Has the researcher attended to the craft of oral history research?
- Is the methodology or project innovative (if appropriate)?
- Is the representation artful, evocative, and vivid?
- Does the project create resonance, build empathy or understanding across differences, and/or raise critical consciousness?



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Villarreal, M. (2006). Finding Our Place: Reconstructing Community through Oral History**.** *Oral History Review, 33*, 45–64.
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Wolf, N. (1991). *The beauty myth.* New York: Bentham Doubleday Dell.

Suggested Readings

Al-Ali, N. S. (2007). *Iraqi women: Untold stories from 1948 to the present.* London: Zed Books.

This oral history gives voice to Iraqi women. Using interviews, life stories, personal narratives, and historical events, the author shares the typically overlooked experiences of Iraqi women from 1948 to the present.

Atkinson, P., Coffey, A., & Delamont, S. (2003). *Key themes in qualitative research: Continuities and change.* Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press.

In this volume of qualitative research, the authors blend the guides from the past with the new ideas of postmodernists. Though focusing mainly on ethnography, the authors directly address issues for oral historians and the progression of the method.

Baker, A. (2007). *It's good to be a woman—Voices from Bryn Mawr, class of'62.* Exeter, NH: PublishingWorks.

This compilation of oral histories, from the Bryn Mawr graduates of 1962, links the social and political with individual women of Bryn Mawr College. Specifically, these oral histories recount how these women were part of changing the feminist movement.

Bell, B. (2001). *Walking on fire: Haitian women's stories of survival and resistance.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

This book focuses on thirty-eight Haitian women who have endured poverty and violence. In doing so, the author also provides examples of activism and solidarity among the women. This book explores the culture of political and social oppression for Haitian women.

Borland, K. (2006). *Unmasking class, gender, and sexuality in Nicaraguan festival.* Tuscon: University of Arizona Press.

Borland uses case studies to explore social meaning and negotiation between people in Nicaraguan culture. Specifically, the author explores this culture within the context of Nicaraguan festivals, focusing on the belief systems around gender, class, ethnicity, race, sexuality, and religious faith as manifested in the festivals.

Bryant, C., Collette, B., Green, W., Isoardi, S., Kelson, J., Tapscott, H., Wilson, G., & Young. M. (Eds.) (1998). *Central Avenue sounds: Jazz in Los Angeles.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

This edited collection of 19 life histories gives collective voice to storytellers in Los Angeles' Central Avenue jazz subculture. The storytellers recount the experiences of a community of musical vigor, Los Angeles.

Burke, C. (1992). *Vision narratives of women in prison*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.

This book focuses, not on the descriptions of prison life for women in the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women, but rather on the prisoners' stories of supernatural visions—the prisoners' narratives.

Charlton, T. L., Myers, L. E., & Sharpless, R. (Eds.). (2006). *Handbook of oral history*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.

This handbook of oral history covers the broad scope of oral history as a tool, and as an area for scholarly research. The handbook covers the history, methods, theory, approaches, innovations, and applications of oral history over the past thirty years.

Cline, D. P. (2006). *Creating choice: A community responds to the need for abortion and birth control, 1961-1973.* New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

This collection of edited interviews explores those who were involved in the fight for securing women's access to birth control and abortion in western Massachusetts. The book expands upon the traditional analysis of this historical moment, the focus on feminist activists, by including those involved at all levels of the fight; i.e., grassroots activists, clergy, medical practitioners, health educators, etc.

Coser, R. L., Anker, L. S., & Perrin, A. J. (1999). *Women of courage: Jewish and Italian immigrant women in New York.* Connecticut: Greenwood Press.

This book uses 100 oral history interviews of Jewish and Italian women who moved to the U.S. before 1927. With this, the author exposes the stories of immigration, cultural change, and family strategies from the perspectives of the women who were interviewed.

Coughey, J. L. (2006). *Negotiating cultures and identities: Life history issues, methods, and readings.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

This edited interdisciplinary collection provides the reader with works on the impact of culture and identity within the discipline of oral history. The book explores procedures and pertinent case studies.

Culbeck, C. (1998). *Living feminism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This book examines the cross-generational feminist lives of 60 daughters, mothers, and grandmothers in Australia, in order to deconstruct the positive aspects of feminism as it affects/affected each generation of women.

Denis, P., & Ntsimane, R. (2008). *Oral history in a wounded country: Interactive interviewing in South Africa.* Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: University of KwaZuli-Natal Press.

In this oral history book, the authors make use of oral history to serve as a way to document great change in the South African community devastated by political, social and cultural upheavals.

Edin, K., & Kefalas, M. (2005). *Promises I can keep: Why poor women put motherhood before marriage.* Berkeley: The University of California Press.

The authors spent five years interviewing and collecting data on 162 low-income single mothers living in economically desolate neighborhoods throughout areas of Philadelphia and Camden, New Jersey. This books seeks to unravel and understand the mothers' lives and choices within the context of their world, and through their perspective.

Estes, S. (2007). *Ask and tell: Gay and lesbian veterans speak out*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Using oral history as a primary method, this book gives voice to veterans affected by the "don't ask, don't tell" policy in the United States armed forces. In doing so, this book offers both a deeper understanding of gay men and lesbians who have served in the military, and serves as a campaign to eliminate the "don't ask, don't tell" policy.

Feinstein, S. (2007). *Ask me now: Conversations in jazz and literature.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

This book features twenty oral history interviews with individuals passionate and knowledgeable about literature and jazz. The book puts a magnifying glass on this very small and esoteric world.

Fessler, A. (2006). *The girls who went away: The hidden history of women who surrendered children for adoption in the decades before Roe v. Wade.* New York: The Penguin Press.

This book tells the story of girls who were forced to give up their children to adoption agencies before the passing of *Roe v. Wade*. The author uses oral histories to uncover this overlooked segment of history.

Fine, M., & Weis, L. (1998). *The unknown city: The lives of poor and working-class young.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Using the life histories of 154 poor and working-class women and men, the authors uncover the urban realities of these largely overlooked young adults. In doing so, the authors help to contribute to more effective and inclusive public policy.

Fontana, A., & Prokos, A. H. (2007). *The interview: From formal to postmodern*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

This oral history textbook explores the critical methods involved with interviewing. Specifically, the book focuses on the different types of interviews, the uses of the interviews, the benefits and the shortcomings. This book is intended for an audience at the beginning stages of learning to interview.

Frisch, M. (1990). *A shared authority: Essays on the craft and meaning of oral and public history.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

This edited collection of oral history essays explores oral history topics such as cultural politics, oral history and collective memory, issues of documentary, public history and programming, etc.

Gallo, M. M. (2007). *Different daughters: A history of the Daughters of Bilitis and the rise of the lesbian rights movement.* New York: Seal Press.

This oral history fills a gap in lesbian historiography. It aims to give voice to the Daughters of Bilitis, who were foremost in changing the social position of lesbians in the United States, but have been left out of many lesbian rights movement texts.

Gluck, S. B., & Patai, D. (1991). *Women's words: The feminist practice of oral history.* New York: Routledge.

This edited collection of essays examines the problems with, and approaches to, feminist oral history with intentions for its readers to become more reflexive, critical, and analytical feminist oral historians.

Guberman, J. K (Ed.) (2005). *In our own voices: A guide to conducting life history interviews with American Jewish women.* Brookline, MA: Jewish Women's Archive.

This oral historian guide emphasizes the processes of oral history. Though this book focuses on the collection of oral history for Jewish women, it provides a universally applicable systematic approach to conducting and collecting oral history interviews.

Gutiérrez, M. M., & Noyola, S. A. (2007). *Chicanas in charge: Texas women in the public arena.* Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.

In this book, the authors use oral history narratives to explain and explore the lives of significant women in Texas politics and activism from the 1940s to the present. The book links the profiles of the women while also pointing out their individual accomplishments in changing and shaping Texas.

Guy, R. (2007). *From diversity to unity: Southern and Appalachian migrants in uptown Chicago, 1950-1970.* Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

This book examines the experience of rural southerners who migrated to urban Chicago during the post-World War II years. The author utilizes a variety of data collection methods, but primarily uses oral histories to get a deeper understanding and appreciation for this particular subculture.

Hamilton, R., & Shopes, L. (Eds.). (2008). *Oral history and public memories*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

This edited collection of essays addresses questions about oral history. Specifically, what is the relationship between individual memory and collective memory? The authors utilize a multitude of perspectives, issues, and sites to address this question.

Historia, Antropología, y Fuentes Orales, 37(1). (2007).

This Spanish-language journal explores oral history across disciplinary traditions. This particular edition is comprised of four sections, each

section spanning a different part of the globe. This journal is particularly useful for oral historians interested in international research.

Hoberman, M. (2008). *How strange it seems: The cultural life of Jews in small-town New England.* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

The author uses oral history narratives to examine the life of Jews in small-town New England life from 1900–2000. Hoberman looks at both the economic and personal lives of the Jews in this community, exploring both their struggles and successes.

Howard, J. (1999). *Men like that: A southern queer history*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

In this book, the author uses oral history to help uncover queer pasts and queer life in Mississippi. This author uses fifty oral histories, along with newspaper reports and court records, to give life to the tucked-away culture of male–male sexual desire.

Hudson, K. (2007). *Women in Texas music: Stories and songs.* Austin: University of Texas Press.

Using oral history interviewing, the author taps into the world of women who have dedicated their lives to the creativity, emotion, and depth of music. This anthology of interviews uncovers the processes and motivations of 39 female musicians.

Hutchinson, S. (2007). *From quebradita, to duranguense: Dance in Mexican American youth culture.* Tuscon: University of Arizona press.

The author uses oral histories to expose the short-lived, and oftentimes overlooked, music and dance culture of quebradita and duranguense. By exploring this culture, the author has helped to define and identify Mexican-identified youth culture.

Isoardi, S. L. (2006). *The dark tree: Jazz and the community arts in Los Angeles.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

This book combines oral history, community history, and cultural history to share with readers the story about the black arts movement on the West Coast. The book includes all aspects of the black arts community

movement; that is to say, the artists, observers, participants, and the audience.

Jeffrey, L. A., & MacDonald, G. (2007). *Talk back: Sex workers in the Maritimes.* Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada: University of British Columbia.

In this book, the authors use 60 interviews with sex workers in the Maritimes region of Canada, coupled with extensive sex work literature, to shed light on the inside world of sex work.

Kennedy, E. L. & David, M. D. (1993). *Boots of leather, slippers of gold: The history of a lesbian community.* New York: Routledge.

The authors use oral histories of 45 narrators to access the voices of working-class lesbians in the bar cultures of Buffalo, New York. The narratives explore two themes in the book. First, the working-class bar culture represents a "prepolitical phase" of the gay liberation movement. Second, the authors contend that the working-class bars and house parties contributed to the homophile movement and that the butch–femme roles were institutions of resistance.

Kurkowska-Budzan, M., & Samorski, K. (2009). *Oral History: The challenges of dialogue*. Philadelphia, PA: John Benajamins Publishing Company.

This oral history anthology covers topics and challenges in oral history. For instance, the editors cover topics such as fieldwork challenges, doing gender, public space challenges, and historiography.

Lael, R. L., Brazos, B., & McMillen, M. F. (2007). *Evolution of a Missouri asylum: Fulton State Hospital.* Columbia: University of Missouri Press.

This book seeks to examine Missouri's first "lunatic asylum". In doing so, the authors first explore the asylum's history using traditional sources. In the second half of the book, the authors use oral histories to go beyond the official record to get a deeper understanding of the hospital from its inception.

Langer, L. L. (1991). *Holocaust testimonies: The ruins of memory.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

In this book, Langer brings to life video and oral history testimonies from Holocaust survivor archives. In his attempt to bring the reader closer to understanding Holocaust and survivor testimonies, Langer uncovers all levels of memory: deep, anguished, humiliated, tainted, and unheroic.

Lanman, B. A., & Wendling, L. M. (2006). *Preparing the next generation of oral historians: An anthology of oral history education.* Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group.

This oral history anthology attempts to give a comprehensive account for oral history educators, in the hope of inspiring oral historians to present their best work and to advance methodology. The book also aims to help prepare the next generation of oral historians to carry on the legacy.

Lemke-Santangelo, G. (1996). *Abiding courage: African American migrant women and the East Bay community.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

This author bases her narrative and analysis on the oral history interviews with 50 migrant women. In doing so, the author sheds light on the history of these women and their experiences in the Second African American migration during World War II.

Light, K., & Light, M. (2006). *Coal Hollow: Photographs and oral histories.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

This book links the art of photograph and oral history to document the life of vulnerable people in southern West Virginia, paying particular attention to the human and environmental damage that the coal industry has imposed, to this day, on the people of this region.

Mackay, N. (2007). *Curating oral histories: From interview to archive.* Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

This book sheds light on the processes of oral history interview management that go beyond the interview. The book examines oral history interview processing, archiving, and preserving techniques.

Mancina-Batinich, M. E. (2007). *Italian voices: Making Minnesota our home.* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

This author uses oral histories to explain the life experiences of Italians immigrating to Minnesota, detailing daily work, gender roles, leisure, religion, celebrations, food ways, and performers. The narratives also explore the lives of iron miners, labor activists, women at home and at work, businessmen and women, and everyone else.

Marks, J. (1993). *The hidden children: The secret survivors of the holocaust.* New York: Fawcett Columbine Ballantine.

Journalists Jane Marks and Alison Owings use their expertise in oral history interviewing to compile an oral history narrative of how child victims and Hitler's followers survived during the Nazi era and rebuilt their lives after the war.

McGlen, N. E. & Sarkees, M. R. (1993). *Women in foreign policy: The insiders*. New York: Routledge.

Using oral history interviews, the authors delve into the world of women who succeeded in reaching a high enough rank in the Departments of Defense and State to have significant impact on U.S. foreign policies. The narratives deconstruct the process these women went through to achieve such a high status and presence in the United States policymaking.

Newman, K. S. (1993). *Declining fortunes: The withering of the American dream.* New York: Basic Books.

This book attempts to uses people's narratives, in-depth oral histories, to understand the phenomenon of downward mobility in the United States. The author examines the voices of the baby boom generation, and these voices help to assess cultural values and their impact on everyday life.

Owings, A. (1993). *Grauen: German women recall the Third Reich.* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Owings attempted a different approach from the traditional Holocaust narrative. Instead of focusing her research on the victims on the Holocaust, Owings recounted the life stories of the women who followed in support of Hitler and the Third Reich.

Pleasants, J. M. (2006). *Gator tales: An oral history of the University of Florida.* Gainesville: University of Florida.

In this book, oral histories have supplemented the traditional histories of colleges and universities. The author uses oral histories to dissect the interworkings of this university to appeal to alumni and share a richer history.

Pollock, D. (Ed.) (2005). *Remembering: Oral history as performance*. Palgrave Macmillan.

This edited collection of essays explores the intersection between oral history and performance. The author attempts to theoretically connect the traditions of oral history and performance studies by exploring authority, voice, performance, artists, audience, playwriting, and community.

Powers, W. R. (2005). *Transcription techniques for the spoken word*. Lanham: Altamira Press.

With a background in oral history interviewing, the author attempts to give advice and answer questions about the transcription of oral histories. In this book, the author provides an account of how to transcribe beyond just "typing what they say" to produce an accurate record of the interviewee's spoken word.

Presser, L. (2008). *Been a heavy life: Stories of violent men*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

This author uses 27 oral history narratives to understand the world of men who have murdered, robbed, raped, and assaulted others. By doing so, the author intends to explore the relationship between violent actions of the individuals and the state of the society in which they acted.

Ramsey, S. (2008). *Reading, writing, and segregation: A century of Black women teachers in Nashville*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

The author uses 51 oral history interviews with African American teachers to explore the perspectives of African American female educators. This study aims to understand how the intersections of race, class, and gender changed over time in this particular southern community.

Riaño-Alcalá, P. (2006). *Dwellers of memory: youth and violence in Medellín, Columbia*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

In this book, the author uses oral history to understand how native youth in Medellín, Columbia have constructed and reconstructed their memories of their violent upbringing. With the amalgamation of individual storytelling from the youth and exploration of their cultural experiences, the author and participants work to create a collective memory of the life and struggles of youth in Columbia.

Ritchie, D. A. (2003). *Doing oral history: A practical guide*. New York: Oxford University Press.

The author, the past president of the Oral History Association, has compiled a how-to book for oral history. The author answers 250 questions addressing a variety of oral history concerns, for a general overview of the oral history tool.

Ritterhouse, J. (2006). *Growing up Jim Crow: How black and white southern children learned race.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

In this book, the author uses autobiographies and oral histories to explore how both black children and white children learned about race and were socialized into their respective races during the time of Jim Crow.

Rosenwald, G. C. & Ochberg R. L. (1992). *Storied lives: The cultural politics of self-understanding.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

In this edited book of essays, the authors focus on the whys and hows of discourse, primarily exploring the way interviewees recount their histories. The essays explore topics such as family counseling, workplace disputes, religion, modern dance, and German death camp survivors from psychological, anthropological, sociological, and historical perspectives.

Sandina, L. (2006). "Special issue: Oral histories and design." *Journal of Design History*, *19*(4).

The *Journal of Design History* has devoted a special issue edition to oral histories and their designs. This edition explores oral histories as a research methodology tool and a means by which to examine human life.

Schneider, W. (2008). *Living with stories: Telling, retelling, and remembering.* Ogden: Utah State University Press.

This edited collection of essays utilizes leading scholars in the fields of folklore, anthropology, history, literature, and museology to expand upon their similar methods and objectives in the oral tradition. Essentially, this collection of essays provides the reader with different approaches to narrative and different approaches to understanding them.

Schneider, W. (2002). . . . *So they understand: Cultural issues in oral history.* Logan, UT: Utah State University Press.

In this book, the author aims to explore the methodological issues in curation and presentation of archived oral records, focusing on issues of shared authority and the responsibilities of the interviewers.

Schweitzer, P. (2007). *Reminiscence theatre: Making theatre from memories*. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

In this book, the author gives examples of the ways in which oral history transcripts can be turned into scripts for the theater. The book also looks at the idiosyncratic elements of playwriting, rehearsing, props, and staging.

Spurgeon, A. L. (2005). *Waltz the hall: The American play party. Jackson*, MS: University Press of Mississippi.

Spurgeon uses oral history not to add to existing historical and academic records, but to create these records and enhance our understanding of the folklore genre as an old form of childhood recreation.

Tec, N. (1993). *Defiance: The Bielski partisans*. New York: Oxford University Press.

This book uses oral history to tell the story of the largest armed rescue of Jews by Jews during World War II. Tec creates a carefully constructed narrative based on her own research, the stories of individuals, their comments on each other, and descriptions of events and leaders.

Tonkin, E. (1992). *Narrating our pasts: The social construction of oral history.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tonkin's book focuses on her experience doing fieldwork with the Kru people of Liberia. Her book uses narratives of storytellers she met in Liberia to attempt to reconstruct the history of that country.

However, the book later covers more general questions about how ideas of the self originate in oral narration.

Walker, M. (2006). *Southern farmers and their stories: Memory and meaning in oral history*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky.

The author utilizes over 500 oral history interviews, focusing on the lives of southern farmers from all different backgrounds: black and white, male and female, upper class and lower class, landowner, sharecropper, immigrant and native born.

Wehrey, J. (2006). *Voices from this long brown land: Oral recollections of Owens Valley lives and Manzanar pasts.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

This book uses 14 oral histories to expand upon a traditional historical framework of the Owens Valley, a major site of the water wars in California.

Wymard, E. (2007). *Talking steel towns: The men and women of America's steel valley*. Pittsburgh, PA: Carnegie Mellon University Press.

In this book, the author explores the demise of the American steel industry and its effects on the people in the towns where these factories once thrived. The book uses oral history to look at both the men who worked and the mill, and the women and children who were impacted by the mills.

Young, H. P. (2001). *Choosing revolution: Chinese women soldiers on the Long March*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

This book utilizes oral history to understand the experience of veterans who set out on the Long March in China from 1934–1936. Specifically, the book uncovers the experiences of 22 women, who made up two percent of the army partaking in the march.

Yung, J. (1999). *Unbound voices: A documentary of history of Chinese women in San Francisco.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

The author utilizes oral history, newspaper articles, speeches, and written autobiographical statements to examine the impact that historical, social, economic, and political events had on Chinese American women living in San Francisco.

About the Author

Patricia Leavy is Associate Professor of Sociology and the Founding Director of Gender Studies (2004–2008) at Stonehill College. She is the author of *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research* (Guilford Press, 2009) and *Iconic Events: Media, Politics and Power in Retelling History* (Lexington Books, 2007). She is coauthor of *The Practice of Qualitative Research* 2nd edition (Sage, 2011) and *Feminist Research Practice* (Sage, 2007). She is the co-editor of *Hybrid Identities: Theoretical and Empirical Examinations* (Haymarket, 2008); *Handbook of Emergent Methods* (Guilford Press, 2008); *Emergent Methods in Social Research* (Sage, 2006) and *Approaches to Qualitative Research: A Reader on Theory and Practice* (Oxford University Press, 2004). She is regularly quoted in national and local newspapers for her expertise on popular culture, gender, and other sociological topics. She has appeared on CNN's "Glenn Beck Show" and "Lou Dobbs Tonight." She was named the New England Sociologist of the Year for 2010 by the New England Sociological Association.

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