

'They had horrible wallpaper': Representations of Respondents and the Interview
Process in Interviewer Notes ^[1]

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Abstract

The role and content of interviewer notes in social research has traditionally received little attention. This, in the main, is due to the fact that the interviewer notes were often written by the researchers themselves for their own use and have not become available for secondary analysis. However, a secondary analysis of interviewer notes can provide a great deal of insight into the research process and the attitudes, experiences and expectations of those working in the field. Using interviewer notes from a little known research project on youth transitions carried out in 1960s Leicester, this paper aims to explore the interviewers' experiences of the research process and considers how the interviewers own perceptions and experiences are documented in the interviewer notes.

Introduction

During interviews, interviewers not only collect data for ‘objective’ analysis, but also make ongoing subjective observations about the respondent, and often interpret responses through their own experiences (Burgess 1984; Silverman 1985; Ward-Schofield 1993; Wainwright 1997; Harris 1997; Wolfinger 2002). It is not unusual for these observations and experiences to be recorded in interviewer notes, and as Wolfinger (2002) suggests, irrespective of any strategies for note taking, the researchers’ own experiences, knowledge and expectations are highly significant in determining which observations are written up.

... Certainly the large family, poor home, might have presented a job horizon of unskilled work... Father seemed authorised and stern, he said “I don’t know what sort of answers you got from HIM!” in various contemptuous tones of voice. Puzzle: mother small, neat and apparently energetic, father well dressed, solemn, a little pompous; all those older children who have previously brought some money in before leaving home. Yet the house was poorly furnished, rather dirty, and chaotic with clothes piled on the table and the two boys I met seemed thin and almost undernourished. However: largely irrelevant to the young worker project. (A558)

This quotation came from interviewer notes that accompanied a 1960s study of school to work transitions. It is clear from the extract that the researcher had, throughout the interview, recorded a number of observations about the interviewee, the interviewee’s family and home. These observations are constructed around the interviewer’s own experiences of social class, wealth and poverty. Although the observations offered are dismissed as being irrelevant to the project, these observations must have affected the data collection and the representation of the interviewee in the analysis (Eisner 1991; Harris 1997; Holland 1999; Norum 2000). However, since this interview was carried out in 1963 there has emerged an important debate as to the role of the interviewer in the research process and the implications of the interviewers own ‘reflections on their actions and observations in the field, their impressions, irritations, feelings and so on’ (Flick 1998: 6). In more recent studies, the practice of data collection has changed to at least acknowledge the role of the researcher as being central in the process of data production. Indeed, it is now commonplace for the researcher to indicate in the writing up of findings those factors (such as biases, experiences, characteristics) that could have influenced the data collected (Christian 1994; Buford-May 2000).

Yet despite the increased focus on the role of the researcher in the research process, it appears there are still few accounts as to how biases, experiences and opinions are actually documented in interviewer notes (with the exception of Wolfinger 2002).

Discussions that offer a secondary analysis of interviewer notes are fewer still. This could be for a number of reasons - the ethical and moral dilemmas surrounding the use of such data and the fact that it is unusual for those not involved in the original research to get access to field notes for secondary analysis. Alternatively, as others suggest, many qualitative data sets have simply been lost or destroyed (Corti *et al* 1995; Hammersley 1997: 137), leaving little opportunity to undertake a secondary analysis of interviewer notes from previous studies.

However, despite being problematic, a secondary analysis of interviewer notes may prove vital in providing the contextual information required for the re-analysis of the data (Corti *et al* 1995). Their study demonstrated that research ‘...material cannot be used sensibly without the background knowledge which they have accumulated during its collection’ (Corti *et al* 1995: 3). Without moving towards understanding the thoughts, feelings, ideas and experiences of the interviewer it would be difficult, if not impossible, for later researchers to fully understand the data or undertake secondary analysis. This is important if through the data collection process phenomenon are reproduced or reinforced. For example, interviewer bias may lead the researcher to ‘over report’ those factors in which they have an interest and ‘under report’ other issues. This may go unnoticed if the secondary analyst did not have access to interviewer notes. A similar view is offered by Fielding (2000) who suggests:

One might also identify another virtue of secondary analysis. Primary data analysis is always subject to the problem that researchers will have entered the field and collected their data with particular interests in mind....There are many methodological discussions of the distorting effects this may have, where the data collected may be oriented to particular analytic purposes. This is probably more often an implicit or unwitting process, but this actually makes the problem worse, since the primary researcher may sincerely believe that such processes have not been at work and so may be blind to their effects....Secondary analysis may have a legitimate claim to greater plausibility since it is less likely that the analytic interests which are employed will have played a part in the interactional field from which the data were derived....To overcome affinities the fieldworker may have developed in the field, some evaluation research designs involve the fieldworker handing over the data they have collected to a second team member who will carry out the analysis. (Fielding 2000: 21)

Presently we are faced with the need to locate over 800 interview schedules into an authentic research context in order to aid secondary analysis. The interview schedules are from the *Adjustment of Young Workers to Work Situations and Adult Roles* project (hereafter the Young Worker project) undertaken by researchers at the University of Leicester, under the direction of Norbert Elias, between 1962 and 1964²¹. The material comprised of 851

interview schedules relating to the early work experiences of youth in 1960s Leicester, and background documents written by the original research team. Each interview schedule contained extensive interview notes documenting the research process.

In line with Fielding (2000), what has become clear is that in order to fully understand, interpret and reanalyse the data on youth transitions, we must first explore the data collection process and the 'interests' of the researchers as documented in the interviewer notes. Even a casual analysis of the notes reveals that the researchers had preoccupations with social class, income and wealth, the home environment, the physical appearance of the respondent and the respondents family and friends. Additionally, the notes reveal the 'highs and lows' of undertaking research in the field. However, what becomes clear is that the majority of these themes were viewed by the researchers through a 'middle class lens' and may represent the interests, orientations and distortions to which Fielding (2000) refers. As such a secondary analysis of these notes is central to our understanding of the data as a whole. Indeed, the interviewer notes have now become as interesting as the data collected during the interviews themselves and we would argue that treating the interviewer notes as data for analysis is as valid as trying to re-analyse the responses that the interviewers elicited during the interview process.

Yet, we approach the task of a secondary analysis with caution and are mindful of the methodological and ethical considerations such an approach suggests. These concerns need to be considered before the discussion proceeds to an exploration of the interviewer notes themselves.

Using Interviewer Notes as Qualitative Secondary Data

Whilst the value of qualitative secondary analysis is well made by a number of authors (Corti *et al* 1995, 2000; Corti 1998; Heaton 1998; Fielding 2000; Thompson 2000), in practice it is still a relatively uncommon aspect of social enquiry.

Secondary analysis is a well-established practice in quantitative social research. Reanalysis of key data sets informs many academic debates, much policy analysis... The same is not true of the secondary analysis of qualitative data. It is a far more modest, indeed, an almost invisible enterprise in social research. (Fielding 2000: 15)

One possible explanation for its limited use are the important epistemological, ethical and conceptual problems it raises, all of which are applicable to the secondary analysis of interviewer notes produced during qualitative enquiry (Dale *et al* 1988; Heaton

1998; Corti *et al* 1995; Hammersley 1997). As Dale suggests ‘...the secondary analyst has an anonymized, ready-made dataset that requires none of the moral considerations that are a constant worry for the qualitative researcher carrying out interviews in the field’ (Dale *et al* 1988: 56).

An initial problem is that normally the researcher who collected the data would be the person who wrote up the research (Dale *et al* 1988: 57). It is also easier for the original researcher to provide guarantees as to how the data will be used and assurances as to how the respondents will be represented. Dale *et al* (1988) point out, no such assurances can be provided if the primary researcher does not write up the research. Indeed, those who are undertaking the secondary analysis of the data may be unaware of any of the assurances that were given. The problem with undertaking a secondary analysis of interviewer notes compounds this problem in that they not only contain representations of the respondents but of the interviewers as well.

Additionally, the secondary analysis of qualitative data also raises issues of anonymity and confidentiality. Unlike survey data, qualitative techniques, such as indepth interviews, are more likely to be used as a means of researching personal or sensitive issues (Dale *et al* 1998) and as such the participants are at a greater risk by the publication of certain findings. It is possible the respondents only revealed the information they did given the special relationship that they had developed with the original interviewer. This view is also supported by Corti *et al's* (1995) survey of past ESRC grant holders, who suggested that a main concern related to the promises made to respondents in order to maintain confidentiality and the attendant moral obligations that such assurances raise. Again, the issues of confidentiality and anonymity are doubly problematic when using interviewer notes in secondary analysis in that one needs to maintain the anonymity of both the researcher and the researched.

A second concern is that problems may also occur where the researcher actually becomes the research instrument in qualitative approaches such as in-depth interviewing (Dale *et al* 1988). As they suggested ‘in these circumstances it seems unlikely that the re-analysis of either interview transcripts or field-notes by an outsider could give more than a partial understanding of the research issues’ (Dale *et al* 1988: 15).

Here the researcher cannot be separated from the data or interviewer notes, and as such one must question the ability of a secondary researcher to re-analyse ‘without first-hand knowledge of the context of the interview’ (Dale *et al* 1988: 15). They argue that the analysis of qualitative data involves not only an analysis of the data *per se*, but

also an understanding of the process through which the data was collected and the interactions that took place during this process.

A final concern is offered by Hammersley (1997), who suggests that secondary analysis may lead to an ‘auditing’ of social research, raising ethical problems for the researcher as well as the researched.

The audit model could be taken to imply that the efficiency and competence of researchers can be assessed on the basis of archived material...Such assessment of the efficiency of researchers would be damaging, however, because it is based on a fallacious view of the research process...It is a much more uncertain and messy business...(Hammersley 1997: 136)

Hammersley’s (1997) views are supported by Corti *et al* (1995) in which they report researchers were concerned about secondary analysis due to the possible methodological criticisms which could be made of the original research.

However, despite these issues, a secondary analysis of qualitative data has much to offer the social researcher including an additional examination of themes and issues or the exploration of new concepts or ideas (Hinds *et al* 1997; Heaton 1998; Bloor and Macintosh 1990). Indeed, Heaton (1998) suggested three analytic approaches – ‘additional in-depth analysis; additional analysis of a sub-set of the original data; or to apply a new perspective or a new conceptual focus’ (Fielding 2000: 16). Likewise, it is not unusual for more than one person to be involved in data collection and analysis. As such the relationship between respondent and researcher may not be an insurmountable problem for the secondary analyst. As Heaton (1998) argues, whilst one of the limitations with secondary analysis of qualitative data may be the inter-subjective relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee, it is often the case that more than one researcher was involved in the generation of the data. She suggests:

A more radical response is to argue that the design, the conduct and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative research are always contingent upon the contextualisation and interpretation of subject’s situation and responses. Thus secondary analysis is no more problematic than other forms of empirical enquiry. (Heaton 1998: 3)

In terms of auditing, Corti *et al* (1995) suggest that ‘whilst this concern is understandable, it is probable that secondary users will be more interested in using data for their own specific research rather than replicating the original analysis’ (Corti *et al* 1995: 3). More simply the intention of most secondary analysis is not to highlight

the flaws in the original analysis or to pinpoint any problems with research design or implementation in the field, instead the concern is more with using the data to explore new ideas. As for confidentiality, Corti *et al* (1995) suggest that a number of steps can be taken to preserve the confidentiality of the research material including having a closure period for the material, specifying restricted access to the material so that usage can be vetted and that the data is anonymised and all personal identifiers are removed.

For the current research, the above discussion raises a number of issues that need to be considered. Dealing with Hammersley's (1997) concern first, it is indeed not our intention to produce an audit of 'the efficiency and competence of researchers'. Nor is it our intention to imply in any way that the original research design was incorrect or invalid. A replication of the study, or a re-testing of the findings (in so much as most of the data was never originally analysed) is also beyond our concerns. Our concern is more about examining how the researchers' own beliefs and experiences are documented in the interviewers' notes in order that we may reflect on how such beliefs may have influenced the data collection and research context. Indeed, without undertaking a secondary analysis of background material, such as the interviewer notes, it would be impossible to fully understand the context of the research or the data collection process and its attendant problems.

In terms of confidentiality and the anonymisation of the present data, the historical location of this data affords us the closure period that Corti *et al* (1995) suggests. In 2002 the majority of this data will be forty years old, and in usage terms, this means that we have gone well beyond the current practice at the UK Public Record Office (2001) which opens files for public inspection thirty years after the file was closed (unless there are specific reasons not to do so). Furthermore, in order to obtain permission to use the data (and to offer reassurances about the purpose of this research), members of the original research team were contacted ^[3].

Dale *et al*'s (1988) concerns that secondary analysis of qualitative data involves not only an analysis of the data *per se*, but requires understanding of the process through which the data was collected have also been dealt with by discussing the research with the original research team. Being able to discuss the research with the original research team was also advantageous as they were able to provide background material and offer insights into the research process, which in turn added a great deal of context to the data we have. Indeed, moving on beyond the concerns of Dale *et al* (1988), and more in line with Heaton (1998) it is clear that the present secondary analysis has

generated additional research themes that the original researchers had not seen. Corti *et al* (1995) also suggests that having access to the researchers documentation should provide some of the context for the re-analysis of the data. Their study demonstrated that research ‘...material cannot be used sensibly without the background knowledge which they have accumulated during its collection’ (Corti *et al* 1995: 3).

The Young Worker Project

For Elias, the original aim of the Young Worker project was to explore how young people experienced work and adjusted their lives to the work role. Elias argued that his approach would be radically different from other studies of the time (such as Carter 1962) as, Elias argued, most of the existing research on youth was ‘adult centred’ and based on the experiences and perspectives of adults rather than the young people themselves (for example adults concerns about juvenile delinquency). Instead this research would be ‘...concerned with the problems which young male and female workers encounter during their adjustment to their work situation and their entry into the world of adults’ (Young Worker Project, 1962: 2).

The interview schedule was semi-structured but the responses tended to be open-ended, textual and reflective in nature. It contained a series of 82 questions in five sections, all focusing on Elias’s interest in the problems of adjustment. The sample of young adults was drawn from the Youth Employment Office index of all Leicester school leavers from the summer and Christmas of 1960 and the summer and Christmas of 1962. A breakdown of the sample is provided in Table 1.

The interviewers were asked to write all answers to questions verbatim if possible and always in as full detail as the time and circumstances allowed. Some of the original researchers recall that the interviews were arranged to take place at the respondents home, after work, but before the respondents went out, with each interview lasting three quarters of a hour or more. The guidance notes in the interview booklet also urged the interviewers to comment on whether the respondents were friendly, indifferent or hostile, the atmosphere of the interview and their general impression noting any problems connected with work, family or leisure, the researchers indeed used the interviewer notes to record their own reflections, experiences and opinions. Likewise, from discussions with some of the original researchers, it appears that the interviewers were also advised to comment on the research process as *they* experienced it. This appears to have been very much a part of the research process

Table 1 Sample Descriptions and Composition

Group	Original Target Sample	Archive Sample
Pilot Study	28	0
Practice*	-	16
Actual Study		
'A' – boys who had left school in summer or Christmas 1962, with less than one year's further education.	330	243
'B' – boys who had left school in summer or Christmas 1962, with more than one year's further education.	160	130
'C' – boys who had left school in summer or Christmas 1960, with less than one year's further education.	300	202
'D' - girls who had left school in summer or Christmas 1962, with less than one year's further education.	200	155
'E' - girls who had left school in summer or Christmas 1960, with less than one year's further education.	160	105
Total	1150 (28) [†]	851 (16)

Note: * The practice schedules appeared to be 'dry-run' interviews with actual respondents. Some vary in the degree to which they were completed. † Totals including practice/pilot interviews.

Representations of Respondents and the Interview Process

The paper now moves on to look at the trends identified within the interviewer notes. In the first section on representations of the respondent, particular attention is paid to those notes concerning the perceived class status of respondents. The discussion then moves on to explore the representation of respondents at the individual level, their physical appearance, clothing and personality, their intelligence, and their employment status. In the second section, the discussion explores how the interview process was documented in the interview notes. Particular

attention is given to the researchers' experiences of 'technology' in the field, the difficulties in gaining access to respondents, and the problems the researchers faced during the data collection process.

Representations of Respondents: Class, Wealth, Home and Physicality[4]

The impact of social class on future career trajectories has been well researched (Willis, 1977; Jenkins, 1983; Roberts, 1995). In Jenkins (1983) study of working class youth in Belfast he highlights the role of the family in determining the different lifestyles followed by individuals. In common with Ashton and Field (1976) he classified the sample into three categories: lads (working class) citizens (middle class) and ordinary kids, according to their lifestyles. He then looked at the influence of factors such as family size and father's occupation upon this classification. Similarly the interviewers in the Young Worker Project frequently made observations about the class status of the respondent. As in Jenkins (1983), such judgements were based on criteria including family background, home environment and parental (usually the father's) occupation and income. The following quotes illustrate the type of points noted:

It is what one would call a lower middle class area - certainly Respondent would be classified as such by his occupation, dress, speech and by his peer-group ties. (A408)

I suspect that, apart from any difficulties of temperament and normal sibling rivalry, the situation is worsened by the fact that the respondent is a grammar school boy in a working class home. His home is an old type council house and not very comfortable. (B306)

Looked like a private semi in an unmade up road, but in the middle of a council estate, with working class sort of family good friendly interview with attractive girl. (E505)

a rough and ready house hold, as we might expect with such a big family. (A126)

... She talks of her loss of shyness and self-consciousness since she left school but I would speculate that the years' of illness left her socially ill-equipped for school life and is still today having its consequences for her social relationships. The most telling factor here is that she cites her sister - still at primary school as a regular friend. These factors are complicated by an obviously poor home life. The house was in a very poor condition. The front room was leading off to another room which had been piled high with rubbish and it was very dirty. The living room was dark and the wallpaper was peeling. The TV dominated and was on throughout my visit. (E488)

The second quote illustrates the way in which the interviewer accounted for the perceived 'problems' of the respondent as being due to the contrast between his home life (noted as working class) and his school life (implied as middle class).

In other interviews class-based assumptions were based primarily on the individual's occupation and orientation to work.

Respondent was from a middle class background and private home and although he was extremely interested in his work he had career orientation and disliked the dirt involved. (B281)

Respondent's father seems to have been very systematic and helpful when R decided to leave school. R also showed signs of a clear middle class appraisal of jobs and prospects and the need to have help in decision-making. (B298)

A comfortable, semi-detached house - which would be classified as working class, however; in terms of furnishings, general impression of the home...She reflects the type of unambitious, passive young worker common amongst factory girls and the antithesis of the conscious chooser of occupation - with work of peripheral significance in one's life. (E705)

R was a friendly, attractive young man in a good class of house - certainly lower middle. There was a friend of the family there who seemed well-educated and had a daughter doing social psychology at the University. The mother was articulate and well-spoken also. This is not therefore a working class family in the sociological meaning of the term. (Pilot)

In these cases positive comments were made regarding those interviewees seen as middle class. In contrast the working class respondents were often described negatively. Where the interviewers' class-based expectations were not borne out during the interview, this also seemed to feature prominently in the interview notes.

R was friendly and intelligent - though not verbally accomplished. The home was untidy warm and comfortable - Father was very much a background figure - it was M with arms akimbo who broke into the interview and demanded to know about what was going on. Having being reassured she became friendly and made a cup of tea. Respondent has aspirations towards a white-collar job - being specifically attracted by the cleanliness of the draughtsman's work. No other members of his family have such a job - neither do his friends but he seems to have been influenced by his school in the sense of having stayed on and worked hard for the extra year. This argues some identification with teachers. The parents gave no impression at all of wanting to be thought middle class [the sons were wondering about with bare torsos during the interview - Mother did not bother about the mess on the table where we were sitting - Father sat munching a huge pile of toast in front of the TV speaking only to his dog]. It is not a socially mobile family unit as far as one can see. Perhaps the aspiration is merely towards a clean interesting well-paid job with no social status considerations. (B109)

This respondent was in Sample B, and in most cases this group clearly fitted the interviewers' expectations of a middle class background. However, here the interviewer is clearly surprised by the working class home environment and seems almost shocked that the parents appeared to have no middle class aspirations. Perhaps as a result of this the interviewer sympathised with the respondent who, by contrast does have aspirations, at least in career terms. For example, his ambition to become a draughtsman was admired and he was deemed to be intelligent. This was reinforced by the fact that he left school with qualifications. The interviewer can see no evidence of family support or encouragement noted in other cases and instead the role of his school environment is highlighted, suggesting that his experience there, rather than at home, led him to identify with the teachers rather than his family. His parents are both mentioned in a somewhat critical way, particularly the father who was seen as playing a very passive role, more interested in his dog and the television than in his family. However, during the interview the respondent did suggest that he would talk to his parents first before deciding on a job.

In general it is evident that the observations and comments made about the respondents who had stayed on at school and tended to come from middle class backgrounds were positive. In cases where the respondent had not progressed as well as might be expected there is little criticism implied and in each case the respondent is portrayed positively.

However, assertions were sometimes made about 'respectability' and in many cases the working class label was qualified with a comment about the 'respectability' of the family, stating, for example, that the '*...Respondent comes from a 'respectable' working class family' (A327), or similarly, '...I met R's mother who was very dignified and "middle class"!!' (B307).* Wight (1993) in his ethnographic study of masculine respectability, consumption and employment in Scotland differentiates between the 'respectable working class' and the 'wasters'. He locates respectability for working class males in hard work, being disciplined at work, having good timekeeping in employment, having a trade, 'right living', being decent and having self respect, being well groomed, managing ones resources wisely, being restrained in drinking and gambling, and going to church. These criteria can compare very favourably to those rough or disorderly males, 'wasters' or those in Wight's (1993) study who are labelled as 'a bad lot', rough, lazy, 'immune to work', promiscuous, anti-social, poor, and unemployed and not actively seeking work. This seems to be what the researchers were suggesting about the following respondent.

R is one of those little rogues called a 'handful' by teachers, parents and anyone in authority. He didn't seem to be either school or career minded but more concerned with getting out with the boys, and spending his money.

The parents didn't seem to have much influence or control over him and the general impression, from both them and his brothers, was that he was a bit of a black sheep.

Respondent had an adolescent disrespect for his parents - "oh they don't do any work"- and seemed to regard it as right and proper that he should rebel, whether against teachers, parents or employers. His brother for the interview brought in a respondent from the pack; so not unnaturally, he approached it with reluctance. Half-way through a friend yelled up for him to come out again so that respondent was concerned to get done fairly quickly - although he never refused to go on and was friendly in a roguish way. Irish, he was a scruffy little character who "gave plenty of cheek" to more than just the butcher he had worked for.

His mother confided that he was going through "that difficult age" and although their flat was one of the most tatty I have been in - lino floor and no carpet, food left out on table, washing and cooking facilities on the landing - the parents were extremely mild, polite and quite well dressed. That peculiar Irish mixture of caring less for surroundings than personal relationships. (A646)

This is one of the few respondents whose family had immigrated to Leicester, coming from Ireland four years earlier. The description of the respondent and his home environment makes two references to his nationality in a somewhat derogatory manner. The family home is described as being poorly kept due to the family being Irish and not caring about their surroundings. Similarly, the respondent is described as being cheeky and again the implication is that his character is informed by his nationality. The respondent left school without any qualifications and had no wish to stay on longer. Although the parents are not blamed for the respondent's lack of interest in school and career their negative role is perhaps implied by their lack of 'influence or control' over his behaviour. In this description the social class of the respondent is not explicitly referred to, however, the comments regarding the family background imply this. There were no surprises from the interviewer and the notes are accordingly negative.

Amongst our sample the employment status and individual attitudes towards work appear to have been highly significant in influencing the interviewer's perception of the young worker. As in Wight's study such attitudes seemed to have a greater bearing than all other factors, including class status. For example, judgements on personality were often linked to the respondents' thoughts and feelings about their employment status and as the following quotes illustrate those who expressed disappointment about

their employment situation tended to be criticised for having a poor attitude irrespective of social class.

R seems to have a bit of a chip on his shoulder, because he hasn't got the kind of job he wanted, road construction. I thought for a grammar school boy he didn't show much initiative over leisure. (A214)

I got the impression that he goes around with a chip on his shoulder, that society owes him a good job with short working hours and plenty of money. (A828)

Likes to think of himself as a frustrated artist, writer and film star all rolled into one. Perhaps his background was responsible for his inability to realise his ambitions but he had an unhealthy desire to pin all his failings on to other people - his parents, his girlfriend, his boss. (B70)

As the preceding discussion has highlighted, the interviewer's comments tended to be influenced by environmental factors. However, comments were also made about the physical characteristics of the interviewees. Such descriptions tended to be extreme, highlighting particularly positive or negative factors or 'unusual' physical characteristics, as illustrated by the following quotes:

Respondent is a tall, thin lad, looks physically rather awkward and a bit self conscious (A126)

Respondent is the smallest person I have met in the sample - apart from rather tired eyes he looked about 12 years old. (A645)

The following set of interviewer notes is amongst the most descriptive and most negative of the sample

One cannot avoid commenting on the physical peculiarities of the boy and his mother. She was an extremely small mouse like woman who seemed to have all sparks of life damped out of her - she let me into the house hardly questioning my purpose and R started answering my questions with the same lack of enquiry. He too was undersized, pitifully, pale and unglamorous looking dressed in a holey sweater and mucky jeans.

His complete lifelessness seemed to be a combination of environment [a miserable back street terraced house furnished with the barest of essentials and so dark] and congenital low intelligence. The family doesn't seem to have had any contact with him about career; R said they didn't talk about it, and he seemed to be a sort of vacuum as far as work choice was concerned until a chance visit to the YEO led him to a race down to his job for an interview. We conducted the interview in what appeared to be the junk room. Yet it was difficult to understand why the family was still so poverty stricken now that all

three children were working and the eldest son had been for 9 years. It is interesting to see that in answer to question 79 R mentions the desire to be a lorry driver, a job that was never mentioned in either 27 or 30. This is his father's line, but it is difficult to say whether R was going to do something about this as a career or whether it is just a daydream. (A851)

The physical characteristics of both the respondent and his mother are graphically recounted. The respondent's poor clothing is described in detail. The respondent's lack of interest in the survey is attributed to the poor home environment and 'congenital' low intelligence. Value judgements are made about the poverty stricken state of the family and the home, given that the respondent and his siblings were all in employment. Although there is no mention of social class this is implied through the description of the home and lack of material wealth. This respondent was from Sample A. The interviewer was given few surprises by his home environment except perhaps by the extent of the deprivation. Neither the respondents nor his family did anything to alter the interviewer's initial expectations and again the resultant notes are negative and critical.

However, not all comments had negative connotations and at times the physical descriptions were positive, identifying desirable physical features:

'...A very confident good looking individual whose intelligence was used for making a rationale of life - yet he wasn't bigoted. (B277)

R was friendly but a little reserved, I think probably inhibited a bit by the tape. He was V good looking. (B72)

R was a quiet, rather attractive girl but was very nervous during the interview - physically trembling at time. She was, however, determined to play the hostess - preparatory to her marriage this year - and invited me to stay for tea. (E334)

A well dressed good looking blonde who was reluctant at first to answer my questions but who thoroughly enjoyed it at the end. She was very talkative and confident. (E371)

Perhaps not surprisingly, the comments again tended to be social class based, with positive physical attributes identified primarily amongst boys in sample B; those who had stayed on at school and were, therefore, more likely to fit the middle class profile of the interviewer.

Aside from physical characteristics, interviewers also frequently gave an account of the clothes worn by respondents at the time of the interview, particularly if the respondent

was either 'well groomed', 'scruffy' or fashionably dressed - 'house was very badly furnished, and respondent was scruffily dressed, still wearing farm boots (A517). Willis (1977:17) has commented on what he calls '...the three great consumer goods supplied by capitalism and seized upon by the working class for its own purposes: clothes, cigarettes and alcohol'. Certainly in these interviews the interviewers frequently thought the dress of the respondents significant enough to warrant a mention. The quotes below illustrate the interviewers tendency to highlight extreme cases.

Respondent very clean and tidy in appearance smartly dressed. (B195)

A poised, attractive, well dressed girl with a strong Leicester dialect. (E309)

A happy looking intelligent boy, well groomed and with an air of affluence. (B216)

When I first called he was absolutely filthy - he'd just come from work. The second time he was bathed and changed and was dressed in a well cut Beatles suit. (A585)

A rather bizarre character looking worn and tired dressed in skintight pale blue jeans, boots a thick leather belt and a black T shirt. With long blonde hair styled in a Tony Curtis fashion and may well have been dyed. (A909)

Respondent was really 'with it' when I first met him, wearing a Beatles collectors suit. (B112)

These comments on fashion were undoubtedly a reflection of the period in which the interviews were carried out. As Hebdige (1974:4) explains, 1964 was the year in which the first bank holiday confrontations between 'mods' and 'rockers' took place. The 'mods' were defined as 'working class teenagers ... who could be readily identified by characteristic hairstyles, clothing etc.'. In later work, such as Jenkins (1983:50), the physical appearance of youth groups was highly significant. He, for example, identified that the working class group in his sample were '...more likely to be tattooed and ... less interested in up-to-date fashion styles, sticking to denims and leather jackets while tapered trousers and winkle-pickers were fashionable...' than the more middle class individuals who tended to be more 'up-to-date'.

Assessments of the respondent's level of intelligence were also provided in the more extreme cases, for example, if the interviewee appeared to be either somewhat lacking in intelligence or particularly 'bright'. The extracts below illustrate the type of notes made in the case of respondents who were thought to be of low intelligence:

Respondent is mentally backward and was not able to answer any questions which required thought - I asked the simple questions but did not pursue any which I thought were unsuitable (A372)

A pathetic little boy. At a guess I'd say 'D' stream or worse of a secondary modern. Yet his F[ather] repeated several times that he was very shy and it may have been more nervousness than sheer stupidity that produced these poor questionnaire results. (A692)

An unsuccessful interview, partly because the parents made nuisances of themselves and partly because of "shyness", lack of co-operation and probably below average intelligence of the R. The family was Irish and...of that peculiar breed of Irish fathers who succeed in retarding the development of their daughters, calling it upbringing. Consequently R never came into her own during the interview...(D264)

As can be seen, alongside comments on intelligence, negative references are also made to nationality. The linkage between the level of intelligence of the girl in the final quote and her father's Irishness is clear in the interviewer's thoughts. By contrast the perceived high intelligence of other respondents was commented upon in a positive way, as highlighted by these quotes.

He was an extremely intelligent boy, he used for example, such words as jubilant and extravert quite naturally. On leaving the house he said "I suppose you are going to use the old psycho on all this" (B183)

An alert young man, full of ideas and confidence in himself, learns quickly from experience. (A665)

The respondents were also subject to judgement of their personality traits. These comments often focussed on the shyness of the respondent or at the opposite end of the spectrum, 'cheekiness'.

His mother told him to be sure to be serious in giving answers so he probably tends to be cheeky. (A134)

R was extremely shy, would not answer the door, or look at me or speak to me at first. (A687)

Very shy at first and so answers were very limited but became more interested and confident gradually. She hasn't very much confidence in herself, maybe because she has an elder sister (20) who is cleverer than her, according to the parents.(Pilot)

Certain personality traits, for example, cheerfulness, charm and extraversion were seen as positive characteristics.

R is a cheerful likeable friendly lad, v co-operative and open, looks if anything a bit younger than his years and not very interested in his appearance, though clean and not exactly untidy. (A764)

R was most charming the whole time, and if he continues to use this charm for his own ends, he should do very well as a sales rep. His answers to Q76 give the impression that he is perhaps rather immoral. I would not say that this is not the case however. I think he answered the question in this way because he felt that it was the way a "gay young man" should answer such questions. He rather fancied himself as a 'Tom Jones'. (B113)

What emerges from the analysis is the importance of the perceived social class of the respondent. It is likely that the interviewing team already held preconceived ideas about the respondent depending upon the sample in which they had been categorised. For example, the respondents in the 'B' sample had stayed at school for at least an extra year and in most cases these respondents came from middle class homes in middle class areas. These respondents came from similar social backgrounds to the interviewers and, as such, the comments made tended to be empathetic and generally positive. The comments made about the boys in sample A who had left school at the earliest opportunity and, broadly speaking, came from more socially deprived backgrounds, were of a more negative nature.

Representations of the Interview Process

A great deal of insight into the research process can also be gleaned from the interviewers' own accounts of the fieldwork from the interviewer notes. The value of such insights is well made by both Fielding (2000) and Corti (1998), in that these accounts document the realities of social research and clearly contrast with the logical, smooth, rational and 'perfect' research process described in many textbooks. These notes provide 'case material for teaching, and methodological development, where researchers' own diaries, logs, memos and notes can offer insight into the process of the fieldwork in a way which is seldom forthcoming from methods textbooks' (Fielding 2000: 16). In many instances in the Young Worker project, the research process represented a struggle in terms of the technology they used, access to respondents, and data collection[5].

One of the most significant technological advances in social research since its inception must be the ability for those working in the field to systematically and faithfully record the words of the respondents using tape, or (more recently) digital media. Such an approach allows the researcher to replay and reflect on the interview without relying

solely on field notes. It also means the authenticity of the data can be maintained. Most methodological textbooks would recommend the recording of interview data for that very reason. However, not many texts actually reflect on the problems that technology may impose on the researcher. Yet in practice the process of recording an interview may not be so straightforward. Problems may include respondents not agreeing to the recording, respondents adapting their answers for tape, or technological breakdown. The later issue was certainly true in the present research. From our discussions with the original interview team, in the Young Worker project they would use large reel-to-reel tape recorders to commit the responses to tape, and initially, they were used with seemingly good effect.

We find each interview leaves quite a vivid impression, different from the next one, and it is hard to see general patterns at this stage. We are getting very good results with tape recorders. (Riddell et al 1963: 2)

However, whilst the researchers were initially able to obtain good results with the tape recorders, the process of recording the interviews was not that straightforward and beset by technical problems.

tape recorder as used, but a flaw in tape recorder caused a distortion, but managed to write up most of the material although the last 1/3rd of the schedules responses were based on memory as the tape went so slow and then very fast that it was impossible to decipher the interview. Any in-accuracy very slight as I wrote it up shortly after he interview. (A620)

Tape recorder failed to record this interview which was written up next day from memory. R was working on his motorcycle when I arrived. He'd learned about survey from friends at work. (A141)

A tape recorder was used for this interview but unfortunately it was not recording. As a result the schedule has been written completely from memory. Because of this, it was very fortunate that the R had only had one job and that she had been to no classes, clubs or associations. (D750)

This interview was written up from memory as the tape recorder erased. (A145)

From the interviewer notes, it is clear that the researchers experienced real difficulties with the tape recorder. The recorder either failed to work or would fail to record. What we also see is a glimpse of the problems caused by human error, i.e. when the tape recorder is mistakenly not switched on or the problems of having to write up the interview notes from memory. What also becomes all too apparent is the sense of frustration with the technology

Bloody tape recorder didn't record again - but could remember almost every word - wrote it up same evening. (A260)

Interestingly, the tape recorders also generated some unexpected interaction between the researchers and the young people being interviewed. Indeed, from some of the interviews it is clear that the respondents have as much, if not more, technological ability as the researchers.

The tape stopped after 5 questions - R kindly fixed it. (Pilot)

R fixed up an appointment which he did not keep, but was there the next time. He was very friendly, but had less to say than I thought he would have. He used his own little tape recorder for a bit it wasn't very good. Reasonably furnished council house. (A867)

Another key feature of the interviews seems to be that the researchers faced a certain amount of hostility. As suggested above, the original researchers were asked to indicate whether the interviewee was hostile, indifferent or friendly and similarly reflect on whether the atmosphere surrounding the interview was poor, moderate or good. The researchers reported that of the 851 interviews, 15 interviewees were hostile and 139 were indifferent. In terms of atmosphere, 50 interview situations were described as poor with 219 being recorded as moderate. Part of the hostility may have in fact been due to the 'reality' of undertaking this kind of research in the field with respondents who are just not interested. As suggested above, the interviews were undertaken in the respondent's home after they had returned home from work. It is conceivable that the respondents had no interest in answering questions, or speaking to the researchers, after what had been (for them) a full working day. After a day at work the respondents may just have wanted to spend their leisure time in a way that suited them:

Appointment had been made by Mr (after F had made a mistake in the shift R was working). R was alone when I called and seemed to have made up his mind to say no. Talked round the subject, told him about the project and the content of the schedule and he said he would answer if I did it quickly as he wanted to continue mending his bike...and in any case was waiting for someone to call round. He refused to let me use the tape recorder and stood over me in a very hostile way as I asked the questions and noted the answers. He found it difficult to verbalise quickly and made no effort with the why? questions - even though some seemed to catch his interest he paused and then said "Don't know". (C423)

However, in other situations the hostility shown by the respondents to the research increased when other family members or friends were present during the interview.

R was indifferent to take interview at first and positively hostile towards the end when his father was present. He left the room immediately, F started to ask me questions about the research and returned only to see me out. The interview was the shortest I have ever done - 25 minutes tape - but even that seemed too long to hold the boy's interest. (A944)

F was rather critical of the project, and it was only after lengthy persuasion that he finally agreed to the interview being conducted. (D750)

Parents entered at about Q65 and were, especially the father, vividly hostile. Tried hard to intervene and spoil interview atmosphere which had been good up to then. Boy became more cautious with his answers. (C267)

More problematic than mere hostility, it is clear that the presence of family members and friends during the interview ensured that some respondents either did not answer the questions fully or that they adapted their answers to become more 'acceptable' to those present.

M was quiet at first, positively hostile when I began to ask questions about the family and I am convinced she indicated to R (she was standing behind me) to refuse to answer. I explained again and again but she was not reassured and we missed out the money/home questions. (C417)

I first talked to R father who was very difficult. He scrutinised the schedule. It took me nearly 45 minutes to convince him that I had no ulterior motive... The respondent was told by his father not to answer anything he didn't want to. R obviously didn't want to be interviewed at all. He refused to answer 2 questions for no obvious reasons I could see apart from bloody mindedness. Mother was present all the time and made one interruption. It was a difficult interview, rushed and taken in a strained atmosphere. (B304)

*The mother didn't help at the start of the interview by saying "I shouldn't find **** easy to talk to, he was a funny lad", this in front of him. His younger sister's also kept poking fun at him during the course of the interview, because of some of the words he used e.g. bloke, owt and nowt, and his younger brother was the cause of quite a bit of embarrassment to his mother (not to me). (A397)*

A very subdued and inarticulate R. This might have been due to pressure of parents, particularly F... (D647)

As in most research, those undertaking the interviews and knocking on doors in order to gain a response were confronted by a range of problems relating to access. It appears that for some of the respondents' parents there was an anxiety that the researchers were actually salespeople intent on selling everything from tape recorders to encyclopaedias.

After convincing Father & Mother I was not selling anything it was a good interview held in the presence of the family and a friend. (B91)

F was very sceptical about the interview and he demanded that I show him my "permit". After assuring him that I was not from the police and was not trying to sell him a tape recorder he was keen for me to conduct the interview. (C159)

M was interested (perhaps I should say suspicious). She stopped me on way out of house to ask for more details of the purpose of the interview. She told me after our conversation she thought I might be trying to sell something and warned R against being persuaded to buy something. (A421)

I had considerable difficulty in convincing R's mother that I was not selling encyclopedias. R had not come home so I called again later. Another quite lengthy explanation followed before I was taken into the front room. (B85)

M described an experience with two self-professed educationalists which had resulted in them buying £30 worth of encyclopaedias - this accounting for the initial suspicion and hostility I encountered in a pre interview call. (A841)

Mother brought in coffee, and apologised for nearly having shut the door in my face at first because she'd seen my car around the neighbourhood for several nights and had presumed I was selling books or something. (B221)

The researchers had obviously experienced this response so often that they themselves began to 'jokingly' reflect on the issues of selling

...friendly and welcoming family though father a bit stern and I felt it would have gone badly for me if I'd turned out to be selling encyclopaedias! (A541)

Conclusions

The aims of this paper were to examine the interviewers' experiences of the research process and consider their own perceptions and expectations as documented in the interviewer notes. The interviewer notes came from 851 interviews carried out in 1960s Leicester as part of the Young Worker project. It was suggested that a secondary analysis of interviewer notes could provide a great deal of insight into the research process and the attitudes, experiences and expectations of those working in the field. It was argued that to understand such attitudes, experiences and expectations was essential for the successful secondary analysis of the interview data. Such a secondary analysis would help us understand the process of data collection and the context of the research. However, we also acknowledged that any secondary analysis of the interview notes needed to be set in the context of a discussion of the ethical and epistemological implications of qualitative secondary analysis. From this discussion a number of key points needed consideration - that normally the researcher who collected the data would be the person who wrote up the research; the original researchers would have provided guarantees as to how the data would be used; there are issues of anonymity and confidentiality; the interviewers may have written their personal reflections in the interviewer notes without intending them to be subjected to secondary analysis and, as such, there may be a problem with the auditing of social research practice; the researcher often becomes the research instrument and cannot be separated from the process; and finally there is the possibility that the respondents only responded due to the special relationship that they had developed with the original interviewer.

However, these possible limiting factors, it was suggested, needed to be counter-balanced by the positive contributions that secondary analysis can make, including - the secondary analysis of qualitative data may allow an additional examination of themes and issues or the exploration of new concepts or ideas; the possibility that without undertaking a secondary analysis of background material it would be impossible to fully understand the context of the research or the data collection process and its attendant problems; the fact that often more than one person is involved in data collection and analysis and as such the interrelationship between respondent and researcher may not be an insurmountable problem for the secondary analyst; and that finally, with a suitable closure period and provided that relevant assurances relating to anonymity and confidentiality are given there is no reason why secondary analysis should not take place.

To reiterate, in this research it was felt that a secondary analysis of the interview notes was essential to both understand the data collection process and consider how the interviewers own perceptions and expectations were recorded. Such an analysis would then allow a more informed secondary analysis of the actual interview data. However, secondary analysis was undertaken only after assurances regarding confidentiality and data usage were provided to the original (surviving) research team members.

As can be seen from the data presented above, the analysis of the interviewer notes has proved invaluable and a number of important issues emerge that need to be considered before analysis begins on the actual interview data on youth transitions. First, it is clear that many of the samples responses, and the interview context in which the responses were collected, were 'viewed' through a 'middle class lens'. As with many previous studies (Jenkins 1983; Ashton and Field 1976), the researchers on the Adjustment of Young Workers to Work Situations and Adult Roles project made numerous observations regarding the respondents social class using criteria such as family background, father's occupation and household income and environment. However, from the quotations presented above, what emerges is that the researchers often described those perceived as working class quite negatively in comparison to the middle class young workers. Comments on physical appearance, family, income and home environment all clearly fell along rigid class lines. Characteristics such as educational achievement, staying on at school, living in a 'nice' home, having supportive parents and having middle class career aspirations and displaying middle class behaviours were always viewed positively and appeared to be what the researchers were looking for. If for some reason a middle class youngster had not achieved, rationale justifications were found and recorded in the interviewer notes. Yet these characteristics were seemingly not at all present in many of the interviews with the working class youngsters in the sample Likewise, the 'fault' for any failures or having limited aspirations was clearly recorded as the respondent's own.

One possible explanation for this has to be the class background of the researchers. It appears that all of the researchers and interviewers were educated to at least degree level or were currently registered for degrees. The researchers own lifestyles, educational and career achievements or aspirations must have contrasted sharply with those respondents who were living in relative poverty and who had limited aspiration beyond their immediate circumstances. The researchers recognised in the middle class young workers educational and career patterns similar to their own and, arguably, as a consequence recorded more positive perceptions and observations in the interviewer

notes. Such a middle class lens must have mediated the data collection process and the subsequent write up.

From the analysis, it is also clear that the researchers own reflections on working in the field, certainly provide insights into the research process and a depth and context not available from simply reading the other supporting documents (about sample size etc) that accompanied the archived data. The researchers describe and reflect on a process that involves using imperfect technology and the resulting frustrations of constant technological breakdown. The research documents very clearly the hostility that they faced trying to access and eventually going in to the young people's homes to interview. They describe a research process that is imperfect, but where they try to collect authentic data even in the midst of interruptions, mild intimidation, indifference and personal scrutiny. We feel sure that these experiences are as valid today as they were when they were written in the early 1960s.

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Notes

- 1 This paper is part of an ESRC project 'From Young Workers To Older Workers: Reflections on Work in the Life Course' (R000223653).
- 2 From researching the projects history, it is clear that the data from this project was never fully analysed or published. For a full discussion see Goodwin, J. and O'Connor, H. (2002) *Forty Years On: Norbert Elias and the Young Worker Project*. The Centre For Labour Market Studies, University of Leicester, Working Paper No.35.
- 3 A member of the original research team attended a conference paper at which the initial ideas for this paper were presented.
- 4 To preserve the authenticity of the data we have retained the notation conventions used by the researchers. R refers to the respondent, M the respondent's mother, F the respondent's father, and S1, S2, S3, etc refers to the respondent's siblings in birth order.
- 5 The difficulties experienced in the field could be set against the problems present in this research from its inception - see footnote two. Alongside others problems, there was an ongoing debate between the researchers and Elias (the grant holder) about the questions being asked. Elias suggested

...I think it would be better to avoid questions such as: 'Had you any difficulties in adjusting yourself to your job?' The inclination of most people would probably be to say, 'No particular difficulties'. Instead I suggest perhaps 'I suppose it was not too difficult for you to get used to the job?' Or, perhaps, 'I suppose it was not too difficult for you to get used to a job when you came from school?' The answers may be divided up roughly into groups...One should allow people as much as possible to tell about their difficulties. The advantage of post-interviewing processing...and classification of the material is obvious. One need not impose upon the interviewed people a rigid limiting scheme...(Elias 1963: 4-5)

What is most disheartening about...the present questionnaire is the tendency to frame questions in a seemingly objective, in an impersonal manner, which could be far more fruitful if they had a personal ring. It almost seems as if one avoids this. (Elias 1963: 5)

The struggle of how to formulate questions appears to have been a 'battleground'. Elias rejects the 'myth' of objectivity, and suggests that those in the field should develop a blend and balance of 'involvement and detachment' in order to obtain the information he required to explore his adjustment hypothesis. Those in the field wanted to use an 'objective' approach more 'in-line' with the conventional positivist tradition. This note is not to suggest that either 'side' of the debate were correct, but more simply to flag up a further problem affecting data collection from the field.

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