Talk and Interaction in Social Research Methods

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Contents

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the like, examining the range of practices through which these (and other) systematic contingencies are organized will likely provide some insight into the affairs being managed in virtually any setting one might choose to analyse.

In providing an extended illustration of this method, I focused on sequence organization, and specifically YNIs and their responses. As I noted in introducing this form of investigation, analysts typically proceed by comparing interactional practices found in both mundane and institutional occasions. To establish a basis for comparison I began by describing the constraints on speakers who produce and respond to YNIs in their most basic form – and the consequences of these resources for the courses of action organized through them. While the constraints set by YNIs promotes accepting the definition-of-the-situation formulated by the YNI speaker, the possibility of a nonconforming response may also constrain how the YNI speaker 'defines' a situation in the first place.

In considering how YNIs are used in courtrooms, doctor–patient interactions and survey research I noted that the resources available to speakers in the basic form of YNIs reflect a variety of constraints – some that are explicitly formulated in rules of conduct (as in courtrooms and survey research) and others that reflect the implicit management of routine contingencies (as in doctor–patient interaction). In this respect, institutions can be 'talked into being' by manipulating one or more aspect of the sequences initiated by YNIs. For example, as we noted, speakers can:

1 systematically shape how YNIs are designed (e.g. by limiting the presuppositions and expectations embodied in it);
2 re-specify the range and types of choice made relevant by the YNI (e.g. by constraining speakers to produce only type-conforming responses);
3 constrain how speakers take up responses to YNIs in subsequent actions.

To illustrate these observations I considered the ways that YNI sequences are shaped in these institutional settings. In briefly sketching how YNIs are deployed in these institutional environments I developed my analysis in two ways. First, I have sought to explicate that, and how, participants in these institutional interactions orient to the specific task, rules and goals that are distinctive to them. Second, by considering these institutions comparatively I have specified how such institutions are situated relative to social life, and how the lives and experiences of people moving through them are shaped into forms usable for institutionally specific tasks. In pursuing both of these goals, this analysis promotes our understanding of the activity of questioning, which must stand as one of the most basic and ubiquitous activities engaged in by our social species.

Note ───────

1. Speakers can form a YNI 'by placing the operator before the subject' (Quirk et al. 1985: 807), that is, by placing the copula/auxiliary verb before the subject.

CHAPTER NINE Understanding News Media: The Relevance of Interaction

Steven E. Clayman

Perhaps no area of social scientific research is more saturated with varieties of discourse than the news media. In the prototypical media moment, public affairs information is conveyed to the audience primarily through the vehicle of some form of discourse: a written story, a spoken comment, an exchange of interaction. Such discursive forms are utterly familiar and taken for granted by consumers of media culture, so it is not surprising that they tend to be overlooked by media scholars. Researchers often use the 'content' of media discourse as a resource for exploring other matters – the organizational pressures bearing on journalists, the social psychological effects on audiences, and the broader socio-political context in which mass communication is embedded. It is much less common to examine media discourse itself as a topic in its own right – the elementary forms in which it appears, and the practices of which each is comprised.

This emphasis is consistent with the dominant metaphor that has guided news media studies. Researchers from otherwise diverse perspectives tend to treat the news as analogous to a 'mirror', to be investigated for the degree to which it accurately reflects, or alternatively distorts, the world at large. Like any metaphor, the news-as-mirror analogy both illuminates and obscures its target. A focus on the *representational function* of news comes at the expense of enquiry into the *social practices* that constitute news and make it an intrinsic part of the world in which it is embedded. As Hallin and Mancini (1984: 829) have observed, drawing inspiration from the later writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein:

> ... just as language is not really separate from the 'world' it 'pictures,' the media do not stand apart from the social processes reflected in the content of the news. Just as language is embedded in the 'forms of life' in which we use it, constituted by and helping to constitute those forms, the media are an integral part of political and social life.

Interest in the 'forms of life' that constitute news discourse has flowered only in recent years, although the seeds of this development were planted as far back as the 1970s, when a few seminal studies spawned what would eventually become a variety of distinct

approaches. Following Weaver (1975), some researchers focus on the overall design of the news narrative (see Bell 1991), which through comparative analysis becomes a window into the culture of journalism as it is constituted in different national contexts (Hallin and Mancini 1984) and historical eras (Schudson 1982). Following Tuchman (1972, 1973), others focus on the foundations of journalistic objectivity and authority, examining the discursive and televisual practices through which the facticity of news is achieved and dramatized (Clayman and Heritage 2002a: Chapter 5; Raymond 2000; Zelizer 1990). Following Fowler et al. (1979), those in the critical discourse analysis tradition have been concerned with the relationship between media discourse and relations of power and inequality in the wider society (Fairclough 1995; van Dijk 1988).

New analytic challenges are posed by the recent diversification of media discourse. For many years, most news and public affairs information was presented to audiences in the form of a narrative or story, and most academic studies of the news media – including studies of production processes, thematic content, and audience effects – quite naturally used the traditional story form of news as data. However, at least within broadcasting, the story form has steadily declined in prominence since the 1980s with the proliferation of programme formats and media events organized around interaction rather than narration – news interviews and conferences, formal and informal debates, panel discussions, town meetings between politicians and ordinary citizens, and talk shows of various kinds. The reasons for this development are complex (Clayman 2004), but it is abundantly clear that interaction in various forms, and involving various combinations of media professionals, public figures and ordinary people, has become a central means by which news and commentary is now packaged for public consumption. This development plainly requires new modes of analysis suited to capturing the increasingly prevalent interactional dimension of news.

Apart from its current pervasiveness, why is the interactional dimension so important? First and foremost, broadcast interaction now plays a major role in the determination of news content. For the traditional news story, the content of news is in essence scripted, determined 'behind the scenes' through processes of research, writing and editing. Forms of interaction, in contrast, are essentially unscripted and to some extent unpredictable. Of course, each interactional participant may have a preconceived agenda in mind at the outset, a more or less settled idea of what they would like to say and do. However, there are multiple participants, and each is an independent agent in this process. And since every contribution to interaction is an important contingency affecting what happens next – every 'move' forms the context for and to some degree conditions the next 'move' – anyone's capacity to realize an agenda is necessarily contingent on the actions of others. The actual course of a broadcast interaction is thus by no means predetermined; it is an emergent product of how the participants choose to deal with each other then and there, moment by moment, move by move. Given this, explanations of contemporary news content will be incomplete unless the interactional dimension is taken into account.

If broadcast interactions are not scripted in any strong sense of the word, neither are they a disorganized free-for-all in which 'anything goes'. Indeed, the parties to any form of talk observe an elaborate set of social conventions, some generic to interaction

per se, and others specialized for that particular form of talk in that environment of broadcasting. These conventions are largely tacit and taken for granted, and yet they are very real and very powerful. They define the boundaries of permissible conduct and shape the actions of the participants in singular ways. Adherence to the specialized conventions is what makes any given genre of broadcast talk recognizably distinct from other genres, and distinct also from the form of talk that is most pervasive and fundamental to social life: ordinary conversation. Moreover, these conventions are meaningful in their own right, and can illuminate both the 'content' of the news and the social world of which it is a part.

This final point bears elaboration. Broadcast interactions are, in the first instance, arenas where journalists and other media professionals, government officials and other elites, and ordinary people engage one another in various permutations on the public stage. The manner in which these encounters unfold is shaped by, and in turn contributes to, diverse segments of society and their interrelations. Correspondingly, their study provides a unique window into these societal arrangements. Just as the conventions that organize news interviews and news conferences can shed light on the institution of journalism and its evolving relationship to government and political processes, the conventions that organize town meetings and audience-participation talk shows can shed light on constructions of the public and its shifting relationship to elite segments of society.

In short, investigating the 'forms of life' that organize broadcast interaction has the potential to shed new light on both news content and the diverse societal arrangements that it sustains. Accordingly, researchers have begun to explore various genres of broadcast talk in these terms. Much of this work draws on conversation analysis as an approach, and uses ordinary conversation as a comparative reference point for illuminating what is distinctive about each form of broadcast talk.[1] Thus far, most work has focused on journalistic interviews (e.g. Clayman and Heritage 2002a, 2002b; Corner 1991; Greatbatch 1988, 1992; Harris 1986, 1991; Jucker 1986; Myers 2000; Roth 1998, 2002) and audience-participation talk shows (e.g. Bhimji 2001; Hutchby 1996, 1999; Thornborrow 2001a, 2001b; Tolson 2001; see also Martinez 2003). A related stream of research investigates speaker–audience interactions in a variety of contexts, focusing on collective audience responses such as applause, booing and laughter (Atkinson 1984; Clayman 1993; Heritage and Greatbatch 1986).

Space does not permit a complete review of the literature, nor a comprehensive introduction to the methodology of conversation analysis. The objective here is more modest: to explore at least some of the analytic issues involved, and to illustrate what can be gained by examining the interactional foundations of news media discourse.

Basic ground rules

It will be useful, as a point of departure, to think about forms of broadcast talk as analogous to games of various kinds. Like genuine games, an interactional form is a distinct mode of activity that is bounded off from the ordinary run of social life,

involves participants with at least partially divergent goals and interests, and is played through a succession of moves and counter-moves.

To understand any such game, an important step is to investigate the basic ground rules that constitute the game as a recognizably distinct mode of activity. While setting-specific interactional conventions can exist at varying levels of scale and with varying degrees of salience (Drew and Heritage 1992b), some operate across occasions of interaction in their entirety and thus inform every contribution. It is these overarching conventions that qualify as constitutive ground rules for a given form of talk. The existence of such ground rules can often be linked to professional norms, institutional pressures, or practical constraints intrinsic to the context of broadcasting.

Two species of ground rules may be distinguished. The first type governs the *overall structure* of an encounter. Unlike ordinary conversation, some forms of broadcast talk (like institutional talk more generally: see Chapter 8 in this volume; Drew and Heritage 1992b) have an overall shape to them, a recurrent trajectory in which the parties address a succession of tasks in a more or less standard order. Structured interactions of this sort can be either brief or extended. At the brief end of the continuum, the telephone call episodes that comprise many radio call-in shows unfold in a routine and predictable way, with opening and closing phases bracketing phases of position-taking by the caller, response by the host, and subsequent argumentation (Hutchby 1996: 14–16). At the other end of the continuum, most TV talk shows featuring ordinary people and studio audience participation (e.g. *Donahue*, *Oprah* and *Jerry Springer*) have at least a partially routinized trajectory spanning the entire programme. Such routinization, which can include predetermined phases for dramatic conflict, spectacular revelations, etc., in part reflects an effort by programme producers to exert control over the encounter in a way that will reliably ensure a sufficient number of lively moments with substantial audience appeal (Grindstaff 2002).

The second set of ground rules concern the *system of turn taking* that organizes access to the floor and hence participation in the encounter. Some forms of broadcast talk, for example late-night celebrity talk shows and radio call-in shows, have turn-taking arrangements that are not significantly different from ordinary conversation (Greatbatch 1988; Sacks et al. 1974). In these cases, there is no predetermined plan or format for taking turns, so who gets to speak at any given point, for how long, and what they can do within their turn at talk, are determined for the most part from within the interaction as it unfolds. Thus, the order of speakership, as well as the length and content of turns at talk, varies from interaction to interaction. Such interactions tend to be experienced and understood as relatively 'casual' or 'non-formal' in character (Atkinson 1982).

Other forms of broadcast talk are organized by specialized systems of turn-taking which are distinct from ordinary conversation and hence involve a more or less predetermined format for the exchange of turns. Most campaign debates unfold in this way, as do news interviews (Clayman and Heritage 2002a: Chapter 4; Greatbatch 1988) and news conferences (Clayman 2004). For both of the latter cases, talk is restricted to questions and answers allocated to journalists and public figures respectively, although this generalization encompasses noteworthy variations. In the

prototypical news interview, a single journalist assumes the role of questioner. In the news conference, large numbers of journalists share this role, posing the problem of who gets to ask each successive question. In most news conferences, questioners are chosen through a process similar to that found in Prime Minister's question time – journalists bid for the opportunity to ask each question (by raising their hands, calling out the politician's name, etc.), and the politician then selects among the bidders. Notwithstanding such variations in turn-taking, the persistent adherence to a predetermined question–answer format is linked to the journalistic norm of neutrality (discussed below), and endows the interaction with a relatively 'formal' character (Atkinson 1982).

Turn-taking arrangements provide for the management of interactional traffic, but they have a much broader significance that bears on the substance of the discussion. In the news interview, for instance, the turn-taking system empowers the journalist to set the topical agenda for politicians, and to ask follow-up questions that pursue resistant or evasive responses. In the news conference, by contrast, with multiple journalists competing to ask each next question, the opportunity for follow-up is much more restricted and contingent. In effect, the journalistic role is fragmented, making it easier for politicians to resist questions and thus 'stay on message'. Correspondingly, US presidents in their news conferences have periodically experimented with alternative methods for selecting questioners (e.g. requiring written questions submitted in advance, using a lottery, etc.), often in an effort to foster greater decorum and to gain greater control over the discussion agenda (Clayman 2004; Schegloff 1987).

Although many turn-taking systems may be summarized in terms of a simple rule, that is 'questions and answers', such rules are, by themselves, commonsensical and not particularly enlightening. Analysis moves beyond the obvious by explicating how the rule is implemented in practice, that is, for the case of news interviews, how a stretch of talk is designed so as to 'come off' as a series of questions and answers (Clayman and Heritage 2002a: Chapter 4; Greatbatch 1988). The following excerpt, which typifies news interview talk, illustrates some of the many complex and subtle practices implicated in this process. It is the opening exchange in Dan Rather's infamous 1988 interview with Vice President George Bush, and concerns Bush's involvement in the Iran–Contra scandal.

```
(1)   [CBS Evening News: 25 Jan. 1988]
1     DR:    Mister Vice President, thank you for being with us tonigh:t,
2            .hh Donald Gregg still serves as your trusted advisor, he
3            was deeply involved in running arms to the contras, 'n 'e
4            didn't inform you.
5            .hhh Now when President Reagan's (0.3) trusted advisor:
6            Admiral Poindexter: (0.5) failed to inform him::, (0.7)
7            thuh President (0.4) fired 'im.
8            (0.5) Why is Mister Gregg still:: (0.2) inside thuh
9            White House 'n still a trusted advisor.
10    GB:    Because I have confidence in him, .hh 'n because this matter
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11          Dan:, as you well know:, 'n your editors know:, has been looked
12          at by .hh the ten million dollar study by the: (.) Senate 'n
13          thuh Hou:se, .hh it's been looked at by thuh Tower commission ...
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Here Rather 'asks a question' and then Bush 'answers it', but what underlies this seemingly simple exchange? To say 'the interviewer asks a question' glosses over what he has actually done to produce talk that is recognizable as 'doing questioning', just as it glosses over the more general issue of what is regarded as acceptable 'questioning' in the news interview context. Rather's turn at talk is not a simple question – it begins with various assertions (lines 1–7) before the question proper (lines 8–9) is delivered. Complex statement-prefaced questions are absolutely routine in this context, and it's one of the features that distinguishes the news interview from other forms of talk with superficially similar turn-taking arrangements. Courtroom trial examinations, for example, are also organized around questions and answers, but there the range of acceptable questions is much more narrow and confining.

To say that 'the interviewer asks a question' also obscures the interviewee's role in this process. Rather would not have been able to deliver his complex prefaced question without co-operation from Bush, who withholds speaking until the question is completed. There are at least two points (at lines 5 and 8) where Rather not only completes a sentence but provides a bit of space before launching into the next unit of talk. These are places where, in ordinary conversation, it would have been appropriate for a recipient to begin speaking, but Bush declines to produce either a substantive response or even a brief acknowledgement (e.g. 'uh huh'). This is particularly remarkable given the damaging nature of what Rather has said in his prefatory statements. He has drawn a contrast between Bush and Reagan in terms of how they have handled advisors implicated in the scandal, a contrast that portrays Bush's conduct as ethically suspect. That Bush nonetheless declines to respond to this accusatory contrast or its components reveals an enormous amount of self-control on his part, but Bush is by no means unusual in this respect. Interviewees generally withhold speaking in this way, and this is also part of the work involved in following the question–answer rule.

Correspondingly, to say that 'the interviewee answers the question' glosses over a parallel set of issues and practices – that interviewees must withhold speech until the question is completed in order to have a sequential environment where an 'answer' would be relevant and intelligible, that they must design their talk so that it will be recognizable in context as an 'answer', and that interviewers must collaborate in this process.

Finally, the question–answer rule, by itself, says nothing about how departures from that framework are managed and dealt with.

Clearly, then, turn-taking arrangements, which may at first seem utterly common-sensical when boiled down to a simple rule, rest upon a substrate of underlying practices that are complex and far from obvious. Investigating these arrangements directs attention to, and reveals the organized character of, an enormous amount of interactional conduct.

Playing the game

Playing any game necessarily involves much more than simply following its ground rules, and this is true not only for literal games but also for the metaphorical games of broadcast talk. Participation involves a complex repertoire of practices and actions, deployed with an eye towards the state of play at a given moment, and geared to a variety of tasks and objectives. Three orders of phenomena, of varying levels of concreteness, may be distinguished. These are thoroughly interdependent orders, and most research combines attention to their interrelations, but they will be distinguished here for purposes of exemplification.

Practices

At the most concrete level, analysis may focus on particular ways of talking or interacting with the aim of explicating what each practice 'does' or accomplishes when it is deployed within some game at a particular moment in the state of play. A wide range of practices may be analysed in this way – lexical choices, non-vocal behaviours, and just about any aspect of the design of turns at talk and their placement within larger sequences of turns.

For example, Heritage (2002b) examines a particular practice of questioning found in news interviews and news conferences (as well as ordinary conversation). The focal practice is a type of yes/no question, termed a *negative question*, designed so that the interrogative component is negatively formulated e.g. 'Isn't it', 'Aren't you', 'Don't you think that'. For example:

```
(2)     [Clinton News Conference: 7 March 1997: Simplified]
        IR:         Well Mister President in your zeal for funds
                    during the last campaign
              1->   didn't you put the Vice President and Maggie
                    and all the others in your administration
                    top side in a very vulnerable position,
                    (0.5)
        BC:   2->   I disagree with that. How are we vulnerable because ...
```

The negative component (at arrow 1) is entirely optional, in that it could have been omitted without any loss of propositional content or intelligibility (cf., 'did you put ...'). What, then, are journalists 'doing' by asking questions in this way? Heritage demonstrates that negative questions invite the recipient to respond with a yes-type answer to the question, so they are, in effect, 'tilted' in favour of yes. Indeed, the preference for an affirmative answer is so strong that recipients often treat such questions as if they were expressing a point of view rather than simply asking a question. In the preceding example, Clinton's response – 'I disagree with that' (arrow 2) – clearly treats the prior turn as embodying a viewpoint to be disagreed with, and not merely a question to be answered.

Here, then, we have a practice of question design that is understood by the participants as falling demonstrably short of absolute neutrality, and hence as strongly opinionated or assertive in character. This way of formulating a question exerts pressure on the interviewee to answer in a particular way. Moreover, when the viewpoint encoded in the question runs contrary to the interviewee's interests (as in the preceding example, which proposes that Clinton's campaign fundraising efforts were problematic and damaging to his associates), the question is demonstrably adversarial.

In the very different context of radio call-in shows, Hutchby (1996: Chapter 4) examines a particular practice that hosts use when responding to the caller's initial statement of opinion. This practice, which takes the form [You say X, but what about Y], involves quoting or paraphrasing some aspect of the caller's opinion statement (arrow 1 below) before proceeding with a substantive response (arrow 2).

```
(3)   [Hutchby 1996: 62]
      Caller:          ....women've been fighting for equalitie:s (.) e::r
                       fo::r, u-yihknow many yea:rs, .hhh an:d i-it seems
                       to me that erm, they' want their cake and eat it.
                       (0.5)
      Caller:          Er:m,
                       (0.3)
      Host:     1->    m-d- You s- You say you sa:y "the:y"
                2->    but I mean: .hh er your voice seems to give awa:y
                       thee erm, .p fact that you're a woman too.
```

This practice is used recurrently within hosts' oppositional responses. However, it is by no means necessary to counter or dispute what the caller has said; it represents a choice among alternative modes of opposition. This particular choice enables the host to avoid directly confronting the thrust of the caller's position, and instead focus on particular aspects of it (such as the caller's choice of words, as in the above example) which are singled out as arguable in a way that casts doubt on the encompassing position. Given the impetus for talk show hosts to generate conflict and controversy routinely, and in response to a wide variety of callers and viewpoints that cannot be fully known in advance, this device is a useful and effective resource.[2]

Actions

Interactional practices tend to cluster into groups in terms of the goal-directed actions that they accomplish (Schegloff 1997). When analysis focuses on encompassing actions as the primary object of interest, the objective is to survey a range of practices that can be deployed in the service of that action.

For instance, Heritage and Roth (1995) have explored the range of practices that stand as acceptable 'questions' in a news interview context. Such practices include not only the prototypical grammatical interrogatives (e.g. yes/no interrogatives, wh- interrogatives, etc.), but also various other practices that can render even declarative

statements recognizable as doing the work of 'questioning' (e.g. rising intonation, b-event statements, etc.). Concerning the same news interview context, Clayman and Heritage (2002a: Chapter 7) have explored a range of practices for 'doing answering', as well as practices that facilitate resistant or 'evasive' responses with a minimum of friction.

Interview questions can themselves be deployed in the service of a variety of other journalistic activities. Interviewers can use their questions not only to elicit opinions from interviewees, but also to accuse them of wrongdoing (as in examples (1) and (2) above), to manage disagreements between interviewees, and so on. Consider example (1) above, where Dan Rather uses his question to mount an accusation against Vice President Bush, proposing that Bush failed to fire or distance himself from a morally tainted advisor who was centrally implicated in the Iran–Contra scandal. Bush's ethical failure is portrayed (in lines 1–7) by means of an explicit contrast with President Reagan, who dutifully fired his own advisor under similar circumstances. Correspondingly, Bush uses his answer (lines 10–13) to defend himself, justifying his retention of the advisor and suggesting more generally that he remains untainted by the Iran–Contra scandal. Questions are thus a vehicle for diverse journalistic activities, each of which can be analysed in terms of the specific practices through which it is realized.

A focus on actions can move beyond standard vernacular categories of action to examine aspects of action that are less familiar. Thus, Clayman and Heritage (2002a: Chapter 6) have explored how yes/no questions can be 'tilted' in favour of a particular answer, thereby encoding a point of view into the question as it is asked. The negative question practice discussed above is just one of a family of allied practices that have the effect of treating a particular answer as correct or preferable. Some of these practices are embodied in the linguistic form of the question itself (e.g. negative questions, statement + tag questions, the inclusion of negative polarity items like 'really' or 'seriously'), while others involve statements produced as prefaces to the question. Much like 'asking a question', the act of 'asking a question while favouring a particular answer' can be accomplished in a variety of describable ways.

Tasks, norms, and constraints

At yet another level, research may be geared to explicating the broader concerns towards which the participants are oriented in and through their practices and actions. Such concerns frequently arise from the institutional environment in which the interaction is embedded, and may take the form of professional norms, organizational tasks and pressures, practical contingencies, and so on.

In news interviews and news conferences, for example, journalists' questions are informed by two deeply engrained professional norms which are often in conflict. On the one hand, consistent with the norm of objectivity, journalists are supposed to remain formally *neutral* in their questions. Absolute neutrality is, of course, an unattainable ideal, but journalists strive for it through various forms of conduct that have a formally neutral or 'neutralistic' character: restricting themselves to the

activity of questioning, avoiding assertions except as prefaces to a question or as attributed to a third party, and avoiding acknowledgement tokens and other forms of receipt that can be taken as supportive of the interviewee's remarks (Clayman and Heritage 2002a: Chapters 4 and 5).

At the same time, consistent with the ideal of political independence and the 'watchdog' role of the press, journalists are also supposed to be *adversarial* in their questioning, and should not allow their guests unfettered access to the airwaves to say whatever suits their interests. Adversarialness is achieved by raising topics that run contrary to the politician's interests (as in example (1) above), by embedding unflattering presuppositions that are difficult to counter or refute, and by 'tilting' questions in favour of answers that the politician would rather not give (as in example (2) above) (Clayman and Heritage 2002a: Chapter 6).

The convergence of, and tension between, neutralism and adversarialness is strikingly apparent in this excerpt from an interview with a 'dog psychiatrist' who works with emotionally troubled canines.

```
(4)   [NBC Dateline 16 December 1997]
1     IR:   A lotta people would hear: (.) about your profession.
2     IE:   Ye:s.=
3     IR:   and say that's a bunch o'poppycock.
4     IE:   Ye:s,
5           (0.2)
6     IR:   And you say:?
7           (.)
8     IE:   I say they're entitled to their opinion. .hh And I would
9           also say to those people...
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Here the interviewer (IR) pointedly dismisses the interviewee's profession as 'a bunch o'poppycock' (lines 1–3), and in so doing he assumes a plainly adversarial posture. However, this attack is not done as an unvarnished action in its own right. By attributing it to 'a lotta people', the interviewer deflects responsibility onto an anonymous collectivity of sceptics, thereby distancing himself from the attack. He also goes on to solicit the interviewee's response (line 6), thereby retroactively packaging the attack as leading up to a 'question'. In all of these ways, he manages to be both substantively adversarial and formally neutral. Correspondingly, this complex stance is affirmed and validated by the interviewee. Although he defends his profession (in lines 8–9), he first waits for a question to be delivered (lines 4–5), and he treats the agent of the prior attack as anonymous skeptics rather than the interviewer ('I say they are entitled to their opinion'). Various aspects of question design can thus be understood in terms of how they bear on, and strike a balance between, the divergent professional ideals of neutrality and adversarialness.

While balancing neutrality and adversarialness is relevant mainly for journalistic forms of talk, other concerns cut across a variety of programming contexts. Consider, for instance, the import of the audience. Although broadcast interactions are in the first instance encounters between programme participants, they have a

'performance' dimension in that they are enacted for the benefit of a third party – the audience who is watching or listening in. This fact is not an inconsequential feature of the context; the participants orient to the audience through the design of their conduct (Clayman and Heritage 2002a: Chapters 3 and 4; Heritage 1985; Hutchby 1996: 14), although the extent and manner in which they do this varies dramatically across different forms of broadcast talk. Thus, in many talk shows involving a studio audience, the on-stage participants directly address their remarks to the audience intermittently throughout the programme. In news interviews, by contrast, the audience is addressed directly only in and around the opening and closing phases (Clayman and Heritage 2002a: Chapter 3), while elsewhere they are acknowledged only in indirect and extremely subtle ways (Clayman and Heritage 2002a: Chapter 4).

Varying styles of play

Thus far, the focus has been on the most fundamental features of broadcast talk, features that are broadly characteristic of specific genres. To return to our game metaphor, we've touched on the basic ground rules that are constitutive of each interactional game, and the elementary practices and actions through which the game is played. But the analysis remains at a fairly elemental level, couched mainly in terms of the basic building blocks of interaction. How do these building blocks combine into more complex patterns or styles of play, and how do these styles in turn vary in relation to features of the social context in which the game is embedded? In addressing such questions, the analytic focus begins to shift away from the inner workings of broadcast talk itself, and towards the social identities, relationships, and institutions that converge on the playing field of interaction to then shape, and be shaped by, courses of conduct.

In principle, styles of play can vary along any number of contextual dimensions. At the level of individual participants, those involved can have varying occupational, professional and organizational backgrounds, as well as varying demographic characteristics and levels of status or prestige. At the level of the broadcasting environment, interactions unfold on different programmes, for different networks, and under different ownership and financing regimes. At the societal level, interactions unfold under different political-economic conditions, national contexts, and historical eras. To what extent do these contextual dimensions matter for the conduct of broadcast talk, and what can the study of broadcast talk in turn reveal about its social environment?

Answering such questions requires systematic comparative analysis, the specific nature of which will depend on the order of phenomena to be investigated. When variations in conduct are substantial enough to involve a fundamental transformation of the normative order of interaction (i.e. the different turn-taking arrangements characteristic of news interviews and ordinary conversation), then they can be investigated by the established methods of conversation analysis involving the detailed

case-by-case analysis of both 'normal' and 'deviant' instances (ten Have 1999: 39–40; Heritage 1984b: Chapter 8). But when the differences are less dramatic than this, involving only differences in the relative frequency of specific forms of conduct, then formal quantification is in order.

The quantitative analysis of interactional conduct is not without pitfalls (Schegloff 1993). It cannot proceed in a defensible way without a thorough grasp of the basic sequential structures and forms of conduct operative within a given domain of talk, as these are understood by the participants themselves. But once this foundation is in place, quantification becomes viable and the payoffs can be substantial.

Consider the case of the presidential news conference, and what comparative analysis can reveal about the White House press corps and its evolving relationship to the president. The tenor of president–press relations has been of interest to scholars from a variety of disciplines, who have suggested that the White House press corps – and US journalists more generally – has become less deferential and more aggressive in recent decades. The domain of the presidential news conference is in many respects an ideal environment in which to test the hypothesis of an increasingly aggressive news media, since it is a locus of direct encounters between journalists and the highest official in the land. But until recently systematic comparative/historical studies of news conferences were rare and underdeveloped. Indeed, the consensus among researchers was that this domain eludes measurement and quantification. As Kernell (1986: 76) observed, 'the adversarial aspect of presidential–press relations is an elusive quality, difficult to quantify'. The difficulty arises from the fact that quantification requires a basic understanding of how aggressiveness is instantiated at the ground level, in actual practices of questioning. It requires, in other words, a grasp of the fundamentals of question design.

Building on previous research on questioning in broadcast news interviews, Clayman and Heritage (2002b) developed a framework for measuring the level of vigor or aggressiveness in questions. The framework decomposes the general concept of aggressiveness into four component dimensions: (1) *initiative*, the extent to which the question is enterprising rather than passive in its aims; (2) *directness*, the extent to which the question is delivered bluntly rather than cautiously or indirectly; (3) *assertiveness*, the extent to which the question displays a preference for a particular answer and is in that sense opinionated rather than neutral; and (4) *adversarialness*, the extent to which the question pursues an agenda in opposition to the president or his administration. Each dimension has multiple indicators encompassing both the 'content' of the talk as well as formal features of question design that previous research has shown embodies salient forms of aggressiveness.

This framework can be likened to a 'thermometer' for measuring the 'heat' in journalistic questions. To illustrate its potential for comparative analysis, consider how the issue of the federal budget was put before two presidents spanning almost three decades – Dwight Eisenhower and Ronald Reagan.

(5) [Eisenhower 27 Oct 1954: 9]
1   JRN: Mr. President, you spoke in a speech the other night of
2   the continued reduction of government spending and tax cuts

3   to the limit that the national security will permit.
4   Can you say anything more definite at this time about
5   the prospects of future tax cuts?

(6) [Reagan 16 June 1981: 14]
1   JRN: Mr. President, for months you said you wouldn't modify
2   your tax cut plan, and then you did. And when the
3   business community vociferously complained, you changed
4   your plan again. I just wondered whether Congress and
5   other special interest groups might get the message that
6   if they yelled and screamed loud enough, you might modify
7   your tax cut plan again?

Although both questions concern budgetary matters and tax cuts, the question to Eisenhower is much more deferential. Its agenda is non-adversarial: indeed, it is framed as having been occasioned by Eisenhower's own previous remarks, and it contains nothing that disagrees with, challenges, or opposes his views. It is non-assertive: it displays minimal expectations about what type of answer would be correct or preferable, and is formally neutral in that respect. It is also cautiously indirect: it exerts relatively little pressure on the president to provide an answer, and even allows for the possibility ('*Can you* say anything...' in line 4) that the president may be unable to answer.

Reagan's question, by contrast, is in various ways more aggressive. This question is similarly occasioned by the president's previous remarks, but here the journalist details damaging contradictions between the president's words and his actual deeds, making the agenda of the question fundamentally adversarial. And far from being neutral, the question's preface (lines 1–4) assertively favours a *yes* answer, which would in turn require the president to admit to being weak and subservient to special interests.

As it turns out, these questions are fairly typical of the Eisenhower and Reagan eras (Clayman and Heritage 2002b). Analysis of a systematic sample of Eisenhower and Reagan news conferences revealed substantial and statistically significant differences for all indicators, all in the direction of greater aggressiveness for Reagan than Eisenhower. But how typical are these particular presidents? Subsequent research currently in progress on all postwar presidents from Eisenhower to Clinton (1953–2000) demonstrates that there has indeed been a significant long-term decline in deference towards the president, as White House journalists have grown more vigorous on every dimension over time.

This generalization, while broadly accurate, glosses over some important complexities (Clayman et al. 2006). The trend for directness stands out as more gradual, continuous and unidirectional than the other dimensions. Thus, while journalists in the 1950s were exceedingly cautious and indirect in their questioning (e.g. 'Would you care to tell us ...', 'Can I ask whether ...'), they have steadily become much more straightforward in putting issues before the president. Since this trend has steadily advanced across three decades, increasing directness is unrelated to local historical events or socio-political conditions; it appears to be a general secular trend. Indeed,

it may not be a journalistic trend *per se*, so much as one manifestation of a broader societal change involving the decline of formality in American life and the coarsening of public discourse.

By contrast, initiative, assertiveness and adversarialness are more contextually sensitive, rising in a more concentrated manner in certain historical periods and falling in others. These dimensions remained at a relatively low level from Eisenhower to Johnson, rose moderately from Nixon to Reagan's first term, declined from Reagan's second term to George Bush, and then rose again during Clinton's time in office. These patterns suggest that a series of historical events and conditions – (i.e. the deceptions of Vietnam and Watergate, the decline of political consensus, economic hard times) prompted journalists to exercise their watchdog role with increasing vigor from the late 1960s to the mid 1980s.

Quantitative research need not be limited to long-term historical trends. Once a valid and reliable framework for measuring deference/aggressiveness is in place, it becomes possible to conduct multivariate analyses addressed to a range of research questions about the specific factors affecting journalistic conduct. Do economic conditions have an impact? It turns out that at least some of them do – the unemployment rate is a broad and consistent predictor of question design. When the unemployment rate is rising, journalists become significantly more aggressive in a variety of ways. Journalists thus exercise their watchdog role more vigorously during economic hard times.

What about foreign affairs? Consistent with the 'rally 'round the flag' syndrome and the maxim that 'politics stops at the water's edge', journalists are significantly less aggressive when raising foreign policy and military matters than when raising domestic matters. Presidents are to some extent shielded from vigorous questioning on foreign affairs, although the shield is not invincible. Such questions have grown more aggressive over time, closely mirroring the trend for questions generally, but foreign/military questions are, on average, consistently more deferential or 'tame' than their domestic counterparts.

What about individual journalists? Questions also differ depending on who is asking them. Contrary to stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity, female journalists have generally been more aggressive than their male counterparts. Correspondingly, broadcasters have been more aggressive than those working in print. In both instances, it is the 'new kids on the block' of the White House press corps who have taken the more aggressive posture.

News content revisited: Illuminating specific media messages

The final payoff of the approach outlined here is that it facilitates the illumination of specific media messages and their 'contents'. All of the findings generated through previous research on broadcast talk and on interaction more generally, together with the sensitivity to detail that this approach fosters, can be mobilized to explicate particular utterances and segments of interaction. This can in turn reveal subtle and

nuanced levels of meaning that tend to elude less fine-grained modes of analysis, whether offered by social scientists or popular commentators.

How to do things with 'compliments'

During an interview with Bob Dole when he was majority leader of the Senate, the journalist at one point characterized Dole as 'a very candid man'. This might at first glance appear to be a straightforward compliment – favourable treatment that could be taken as an index of the interviewer's biased attitude in support of his guest. However, upon closer examination of how the remark was used in context, it becomes apparent that it was far from friendly in its import. Consider, first, how the remark (arrowed below) figures in the larger turn at talk in which it is embedded (lines 12–15).

```
(7)      [Meet the Press: 8 Dec. 1985: Dole]
1    IR :   =If you don't do that Senator tell me wh:at
2            'r the o:dds next year (.) for a tax increase.
3            (0.8)
4    BD:    Well I think it's a very complicated uh::: area
5            because you've got thuh tax reform bill 'at may or
6            may not come over from thuh Hou:se, .hhh you've got
7            uh:: thuh reconciliation process 'at'll be in place
8            next year: .hhh an' then you've got th'so called
9            Gramm Rudman.=So outta that (.) I assume you're gonna
10           have some revenue changes.
11           (.)
12   IR :   You're a very candid man. I think you're
13           [du]cking that question.=[What]'re the odds. Will there=
14   BD:    [ya ]                    [(no) ]
15   IR :   =be tax increase next year d'you think.
16           (0.7)
17   BD:    Well there's a tax increase in thuh bill that's uh being
18           uh sen' over f'm thuh House Ways 'n Means Committee ... .
```

The praise of Dole's character ('You're a very candid man') is followed without pause by a sharply contrasting remark attacking his previous response ('I think you're ducking that question'). The juxtaposition exposes a contradiction between Dole's general tendency towards 'candidness' and his current evasiveness, which in turn casts the latter as deficient by Dole's own standards. It is clear in retrospect that the compliment was merely the first phase of a larger and essentially aggressive course of action.

If we cast the net a bit wider and consider how this turn at talk operates as an action within the larger sequence of actions to which it contributes, its full adversarial import becomes apparent. The topic is the federal budget and the likelihood of a tax increase. The contrastive portrait of Dole is prefatory to a follow-up question (lines 13–15) that treats Dole's prior response as inadequate. The preface looks backward and sanctions Dole for not fully answering the previous question about the prospects of a tax increase, while the ensuing question looks forward and presses him again for a fully-fledged answer.

Contrasts of this kind are recurrent in the more adversarial questions found in news interviews and press conferences (Clayman and Heritage 2002a: 231–4); indeed, we saw another prefatory/adversarial contrast above in example (1). In general, such contrasts function to portray the interviewees' conduct as problematic in some way – self-contradictory, or incompatible with 'reality', or falling short of some normative ideal. In this discursive environment, words of praise routinely help to cast the interviewee as failing to live up to his or her own standards of conduct (Roth 1998: 94–6). Interviewees themselves may recognize that superficial flattery can be merely prefatory to something that is on balance unflattering. For example (analysed in Roth 1998), returning to Dan Rather's interview with Vice President George Bush about the Iran–Contra scandal, at one point he characterizes Bush as 'an anti-terrorism expert' (arrowed).

```
(8)   [CBS Evening News: 25 Jan. 1988: Bush and Iran/Contra]
1     IR :   =.hhh Can you explain how- (.) you were supposed tuh be the-
2            —>eh- you are:. You're an anti terrorist expert. .hhh
3            We- (0.2) Iran was officially a terrorist state.
4            .hh You went a[round telling eh::- eh- ehr-        ]
5     GB:                  [I've already explained that Dan, I] wanted
6            those hostages- I wanted Mister Buckley outta there.
```

This ostensibly favourable characterization treats Bush as an authority on terrorism, but only as a preface to counter-information (begun in lines 3–4 but not completed) outlining his willingness to sell arms to the 'terrorist state' of Iran. That Rather is moving to develop a damaging contrast is projected by his initial formulation in line 1 ('you were supposed to be the...'), which is epistemically downgraded and thus begins to cast doubt on Bush's true expertise. The developing contrast proposes, in effect, that Bush should have known better. Or it would have; it is not brought to completion. Rather had only asserted that 'Iran was officially a terrorist state' (line 3) and had begun to point out something about Bush's conduct (line 4), when Bush interjects (line 5) to forestall the contrast and defend himself. Here, then, the interviewee himself recognizes that what appears complimentary can be adversarial in its import.

Controversial remarks as co-constructions

As we have seen, detailed interactional analysis can illuminate 'the content' of broadcast talk, but the potential for such analysis goes beyond merely understanding the friendly/hostile valence of talk. Analysis can also shed light on what has been termed the *co-construction* of talk – the extent to which it is a product not of isolated individuals but of the joint efforts of multiple participants. Since popular commentaries tend to allocate praise and blame to individual journalists and public figures, the insight regarding co-construction is often counter-intuitive, and its ramifications can be of some significance.

Consider a case involving Bob Dole during the 1996 presidential campaign.[3] Dole faced a major setback when he publicly downplayed the addictiveness of tobacco,

and suggested that Surgeon General C. Everett Koop may have been 'brainwashed' by 'the liberal media' on this issue. While he can indeed be construed as having said these things in an interview conducted by Katie Couric on *The Today Show*, commentaries on the event tended to overlook the extent to which Couric's questioning played a role in what transpired, particularly with respect to the key Surgeon-General-as-brainwashed remark.

The relevant excerpt appears below. Prior to the excerpt, Dole sought to defuse public criticisms of his seemingly pro-tobacco statements by blaming 'the liberal media' for biased coverage of the tobacco issue. This prompted Couric to point out (lines 1 and 3 below) that even 'Dr. Koop' – the Surgeon General and a Reagan appointee – 'had a real problem with your comments'.

```
(9)   [NBC Today Show: 3 July 1996: Dole Interview: official transcript]
1     IR:    But I'm saying, you know, you're saying it's the liberal media.
2     BD:    But again, you read something that-
3     IR:    But even Dr. Koop had a real problem with your comments.
4     BD:    Dr. Koop, you know, he watches the liberal media and he
5            probably got carried away.
6     IR:    He's brainwashed?
7     BD:    Probably a little bit.
8     IR:    I'm not here to nail you in any way ....
```

Dole deflects this (lines 4–5) by observing that Dr. Koop also 'watches the liberal media and he probably got carried away'. This remark plainly suggests that the Surgeon General was unduly influenced by the media, but that influence is characterized in comparatively mild and 'innocent' terms ('got carried away'). It is Couric, in the next question (line 6), who formulates the import of Dole's remark in more extreme terms (see Heritage 1985), offering 'brainwashed' as a way of characterizing Dole's view of the Surgeon General. Dole in turn confirms this (line 7), albeit with marked caution ('Probably a little bit'), such that his confirmation is both qualified and rendered as less than certain.

So while Dole does come to endorse the contentious proposition that generated so much commentary and criticism, he does so only when prompted by the interviewer and in terms offered by her. Neither the action itself nor the terms in which it is expressed are of his own choosing. Moreover, Couric herself tacitly acknowledges that by nudging Dole to this point she is co-implicated in what has transpired. Notice that her very next contribution (line 8) is a disclaimer, disavowing any attempt 'to nail you in any way'.

In other cases involving highly controversial remarks, interviewers may take steps to minimize their own agency in the process. Consider a fateful interview with Al Campanis, then general manager of the Los Angeles Dodgers. In this interview, Campanis made racially insensitive remarks that were so inflammatory he was fired the next day. The issue emerged when another guest on the programme raised the question of why 'there are no blacks running ball clubs' (lines 1–2). The interviewer, Ted Koppel, takes up this issue and asks Campanis to reflect on the absence of blacks

at the managerial level in baseball, and more generally to address the existence of prejudice (lines 3–10).

(10) [ABC Nightline: Best of Nightline: Al Campanis]
```
 1  RK :   I think if Jack were alive today Jack would say: uh:.hhh (0.1)
 2          how come there are no blacks running ball clubs.=
 3  IR :   =Mister Campanis it's a: (.) it's a legitimate question you're
 4          an old friend of Jackie Robinson's but it's a: it's a tough
 5          question for you you're still in baseball:, (0.3) Why why is it
 6          that there are no black managers, no black general managers, no
 7          black owners, (0.3) And I guess what I'm really asking you is to
 8          eh eh you know peel it away: a little bit just tell me (.) why do
 9          you think it is is there still that much prejudice in baseball
10          today?
11  AC:     No I don't believe it's prejudice I: I: I truly believe that .hh
12          (0.2) they may not have some of the: uh: (.) necessities (0.3) to
13          uh: (0.5) be: uh f- (0.1) let's say a field manager, or a puh
14          perhaps uh (0.3) a general manager.
15  IR :   ->You really believe that.
16  AC:     (0.5) Well (0.3) I don't say that the: they're all of them but
17          ther:e they certainly are short ih. (0.5) H:ow many quarterbacks
18          do you have how many pitchers do you have that are black.
```

Campanis rejects prejudice as an explanation and suggests instead that blacks 'may not have some of the necessities' to serve in management (lines 11–14). This remark, while as yet somewhat vague and unexplicated, *may* be construed as having racist implications and thus marks the beginning of Campanis's troubles.

Koppel, prompted by the unsavory implications of Campanis's remark, probes for further elaboration (line 15, arrowed), but in a way that is strikingly different from the approach taken by Couric in the example analysed previously. Rather than reformulate Campanis's remark in less vague and more extreme terms (cf. 'Are you saying that blacks are less intelligent?'), Koppel merely invites Campanis to reaffirm or retract what he already said: 'You really believe that?' Furthermore, the alternative possible responses (yes/reaffirm versus no/retract) are not equally weighted in Koppel's probe; the probe is built so as to invite a *no* answer (via the inclusion of 'really') and thus, in effect, urges Campanis to back away from what he has said.

When Campanis declines to back down (lines 16–18 above), after further talk and a commercial break Koppel gives Campanis yet another opportunity to recast his remarks and thus minimize the anticipated fallout (lines 2–8 in except (11) below). He goes out of his way to characterize Campanis as 'a decent man and a highly respected man in baseball' (line 3), while also downplaying his own expertise in this area (lines 4–5), and he then explicitly formulates his intention to give Campanis 'another chance to dig yourself out because I think you need it' (lines 5–8).

(11) [Nightline: Best of Nightline: Al Campanis]
```
 1          ((Intervening talk; commercial break))
 2  IR:     Al Campanis I want to I'd I'd uh from everything I understand
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 3          you're a very decent ma:n an:d and and a highly respected man in
 4          baseball I confessed to you before we began this program .hhh
 5          baseball is not one of my areas of expertise and I'd like to
 6          give you another chance to dig yourself out.
 7  RK:     Dyuh hah hah.
 8  IR :   Uh:[: cause I think you need it.
 9  RK:        [ha ha.
10  AC:     I:: (0.1) have never said that that blacks are not intelligent I
11          think (0.2) s- many of them are highly intelligent .hh but they
12          may not ha:ve (0.3) the desire (0.2) to be in the front office.
13          They're (0.1) fleet of foot (0.2) a:nd uh this is why there are a
14          lot of black (0.1) major league ball players. (0.2) [Now: (.) as
15  IR :                                                         [eh eh
16  AC:     far as (0.3) h:aving the (.) background to become a (0.3) club
17          presidents, (0.5) uh presidents of the bank I: don't know.
```

But while Campanis modulates his position, he declines to do a complete 'about face'. Although he claims to believe in the intelligence of black people as a group (lines 10–11), he goes on to cast doubt on their 'desire to be in the front office' (line 12), and to question whether they have 'the background to become club presidents' (lines 16–17).

In both cases where an interviewee comes to make inflammatory remarks, the interviewer is co-implicated in the outcome, although the extent to which this is so varies markedly from case to case. In the Dole case, the interviewer is rather centrally implicated. After an initial objectionable remark is made, the interviewer exerts pressure on Dole to adopt a more extreme stance, to the point of supplying the specific terms that will eventually be his undoing. In the Campanis case, the interviewer's role is relatively minimal, limited to broaching the subject that causes so much trouble. Once the initial objectionable remark is made, the interviewer twice invites Campanis to back away from the stance he seems to have taken. The interviewer thereby conducts himself so that the key remarks can be attributed exclusively to Campanis, although the basis for such an attribution is itself jointly produced. While both interviewees undoubtedly said the things for which they were criticized, the interviewers were to varying degrees co-implicated in the process by which these remarks came to be articulated.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that recent research on news discourse amounts to a fresh approach to the study of the news media. It is an approach that puts aside the mirror metaphor and the preoccupation with the representational function of news, and focuses instead on the social practices or 'forms of life' that constitute news and make it an intrinsic part of the social world in which it is embedded. Moreover, it moves beyond the confines of the traditional story form of news to encompass various

forms of interaction that generate and constitute so much contemporary news and commentary, and that serve as a public arena for encounters between representatives of diverse segments of society.

This approach has the potential to yield insight into both the content of the news and the evolving societal relationships and institutions that it sustains. However, it stands at a very early stage of development, and much remains to be done. Numerous genres of broadcast talk are as yet largely unexamined. Those that have been studied can be enriched by further attention to their complex inner workings, as well as their outer connections to aspects of the social world of which they form a part.

Notes

1. For general introductions to the methodology of conversation analysis, see Heritage (1984b: Chapter 8) and ten Have (1999). For the study of institutional talk in particular, see Boden and Zimmerman (1991), Drew and Heritage (1992a), and Heritage (1997).
2. For the more general practice of radio hosts quoting/paraphrasing callers' talk, Bhimji (2001) finds even finer levels of detail – the tense of the attributive verb – that do systematic work.
3. I'm grateful to Tim Halkowski for bringing this case to my attention.

CHAPTER TEN Talking Sex and Gender
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Celia Kitzinger

Research on sex and gender[1] has very often involved collecting talk – talk produced in interviews or (more recently) focus groups in which people talk about their experience. For example, the most famous studies in the history of sexology, carried out by the sex researcher Alfred Kinsey and his associates (Kinsey et al. 1948, 1953) in the USA in the 1940s and 1950s, involved collecting talk via nearly 18,000 interviews, organized around questions about how the interviewees masturbated, their sexual fantasies, the kinds of sexual position they preferred, and their experiences of oral sex, anal sex, sex with same-sex partners, with children and with animals. Publication of their findings caused a sensation ('perhaps the largest public event in science since the atomic bomb', Gagnon 1977: 37) because they exposed how common it was for people to have sexual experiences that were socially disapproved of at the time, including pre-marital sex (around 50 per cent of women had coitus before marriage), extra-marital sex (around 50 per cent of married men and 26 per cent of married women had engaged in extra-marital coitus) and homosexuality (37 per cent of men had an experience of same-sex sexual activity to orgasm). Although they illustrated their statistical findings with some quotations from the interviews, these researchers were not interested in talk about sex on its own terms. Instead, they wanted to know about the sexual practice that was being reported through the talk – to see through the talk to the underlying reality behind it. For many researchers, then, interviews offer only 'second-hand' data: that is, the data they can see and hear at first hand is the person talking in interview, and this is used as a second-hand substitute for the 'ideal' data, which would be direct observation of the person doing sex/gender in 'real life'.

The problem, for researchers, with interview talk as 'second-hand' data is that what people say in interviews may not accurately reflect the reality of their lives. People may deliberately lie or exaggerate, they may forget information that the researcher thinks important or they may try to give the sorts of answer they think the person asking the question wants to hear. According to one prominent sex researcher:

People are, in general, rather poor reporters of their own sexual conduct. The ways in which most of them have learned to talk about sex will distort what they think is