THE ACTIVE INTERVIEW: APPLICATIONS FOR CRIME AND DEVIANCE RESEARCH

Dean A. Dabney, Georgia State University, Michael McSkimming, Gannon University, and Bruce L. Berg, California State University Long Beach

ABSTRACT

For decades, there has existed a disjuncture between the intentions and practices of most qualitative researchers. Many enlist the buzz words of symbolic interactionism or other interpretivist traditions, but a select few remain true to these maxims as they move forward with their data collection and analysis efforts. Holstien and Gubrium (1995) recently presented a provocative new perspective on face-to-face interviewing that specifically seeks to narrow the gap between qualitative theory and methodology. The approach is called the *active interview*. Building on the tenets of symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, phenomenology, and post-modernism, the active interview directs attention towards the nature and dynamics of face-to-face interview-based social science research. The active approach to interviewing conceptualizes the discursive exchange process as a dynamic occasion of meaning negotiation, not a passive question and answer session. The reflexive interviewing strategy that follows is keenly sensitive to issues such as the narrative resources of both the interviewer and respondent, the ways in which a sense of collaborative meaning is negotiated within the interview interaction, and the potential for a single respondent to engage in occasions of *multivocality*. This paper explores various issues and implications that this new orientation, especially as they relate to crime and deviance research. We provide a small-scale research application to illustrate how issues such as respondent selection, interview format, non-conversational aspects of interviewing, and the types of research questions that are posed and pursued by crime and deviance researchers are potentially effected.

> Certain ideas burst upon the intellectual landscape with a tremendous force ....After we have become familiar with the new idea, however, after it has become part of our general stock of theoretical concepts, our expectations are brought more into balance with its actual uses, and its excessive popularity is ended. (Geertz 1973 3-4)

INTRODUCTION

The above quote comes from Clifford Geertz's seminal 1973 treatise entitled "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture." In it, Geertz challenged ethnographers to approach their subject matter (culture) and the scholarly representation of this subject matter (ethnographic reports) with a greater degree of care and precision. He went to great lengths to identify the common pitfalls that ethnographers encounter and proposed a resourceful set of potential conceptual and methodological remedies. Geertz recognized that the project of documenting and reporting the patterned aspects of lived experience is the life's blood of qualitative research.

Since the days of Quetelet and Durkheim, scholars have sought to identify a systematic means of studying and reporting the various aspects of social life. However, we have come to the painful realization that this is a daunting task. For example, numerous commentators have accused "positivistic" social researchers of dispensing with the epistemological and ontological bedrock of social inquiry (Cicourel 1964; Denzin 1997; Garfinkel 1967; Glaser & Strauss 1967; Goffman 1959; Gubrium & Holstein 1997; Lyotard 1984; Silverman 1993). The most convenient and frequent targets of these allegations are survey researchers such as Lazarsfeld (1965) or other quantitatively-oriented scholars who rely upon secondary data sources and generally assume that a heavy dose of reliability and validity will allow them to capture the objective realities of their subjects' and subject matters'.

Qualitatively-inclined sociologists have gone a different route but experience their own set of problems. Most of these scholars have been made aware of and/or read extensively about the critical difficulties that go along with the research enterprise. Too often, however, scholars find it difficult to put the preachings of symbolic interactionism, post-modernism, feminism, grounded theory, or naturalism into practice. A recent review symposium that appeared in the Fall 1998 issue of the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* finds Dingwall, Denzin, Gubrium and Holstein calling into question the veracity of a whole host of qualitative approaches, everything from naturalism to post-modernism. Gubrium and Holstein (1997) provide a more

comprehensive critique in which they identify four camps of qualitative inquiry (naturalist ethnography, ethnomethodology, emotionalism, and post-modernism) and then go about identifying instances in which each is guilty of compromising, ignoring, or glossing over critical ontological or epistemological issues. In short, the literature is not wanton of critics who allege that qualitatively-inclined scholars, like their quantitative counterparts, are prone to shortcomings in their research. As one example, Gubrium and Holstein (1997) observe that scholars often enter the field to conduct interview or observation-based inquiries with a sound plan of action but, unfortunately, spend little time considering whether or not their plan will allow them to remain "faithful" to their interpretive intentions.

Not everyone in the discipline of sociology is willing to embark on this type of blind leap of faith that we outlined above. Suffice it to say that the core issues of what Dingwall (1998) calls "methods talk" (reconciling interpretivist theory with methodology) are alive and vibrant among a cadre of qualitative scholars. These are the thinkers who insist that the discipline and its practitioners not proceed with empirical exercises until we have: 1) engaged in a full inventory of what we know about the nature and dynamics of lived experience, and 2) used this insight to devise and implement methodological approaches that are sensitive to these ideological assumptions.

The ramifications of the "methods talk" manifest themselves differently across the various subsections of the sociological enterprise. It is readily apparent that some subsections of the discipline (aging and gender-based research) have a more pronounced tradition of questioning the core assumptions that guide their research. Conversely, other subject areas (crime and deviance) have not engaged in as much or as heated discussion when it comes to the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of their scholarly agenda. This is particularly disturbing given the fact that the nature and dynamics of the subject matter (crime and deviance) leaves room for some of the most innovative methodological developments.

This being the case, the present paper seeks to accomplish three objectives. First, we review a fresh new methodological approach to interviewing, known as the active interview (Holstein & Gubrium 1995). In doing so, we demonstrate how the notion of an active interview differs from traditional approaches to face-to-face interviewing. We argue that this approach provides specific remedies to many of the practical pitfalls that have plagued qualitative sociologists for decades and thus represents a key advance in the longstanding efforts to bridge the gap between interpretive theory and practice. Next, we present a cursory application of the active interviewing as a way of providing first-hand evidence of how deviance scholars can use the active interviewing approach and how doing so impacts the structure and process of one's methodological efforts. Lastly, we reflect upon this empirical exercise to identify the ways in which the interview-based study of crime and deviance research topics are particularly susceptible to these methodological and theoretical quandaries.

THE ACTIVE INTERVIEWING APPROACH

In *The Active Interview* (1995), Holstein and Gubrium challenge the traditional methodological and theoretical underpinnings of face-to-face interviewing strategies. They argue that most social science researchers conceive of the face-to-face interview occasion as being an objective question-and-answer session between the researcher and the respondent. From this commonly held perspective, the goal of the interview process is to tap into objective meanings and explanations that exist within the respondent's reservoir of lived experiences. Once the details of these lived experiences have been "excavated," conventional wisdom dictates that the researcher proceed by coding, organizing, and conveying the particulars of the topic under investigation.

Building on tenets of ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, and social constructionism, the active interview challenges the assertion that the meanings associated with human experiences are reflected in the form of concrete, objective realities. From this critical position, one must question whether social science researchers actually can use a formal, standardized face-to-face interview to somehow locate, discern, maintain, and then capture what we will term objective realities. Holstein and Gubrium (1995) encourage social scientists to move beyond the conceptual issues associated with the production of meaning and

actually apply it to the research endeavor. More importantly, the authors provide us a series of sensitizing concepts and a practical agenda that can be used by social science researchers to focus their conceptual and methodological energies on both the production and products of the meaning construction that takes place in all face-to-face interviews. This argument follows nicely from the recent efforts to dissolve the boundary between theory and methodology. Gubrium & Holstein as well as others (Denzin 1998; Dingwall 1998) observe that increasing numbers of scholars are trying to bridge the epistemological gaps between ethnomethodology and postmodernism via reflexive, story-based manifestations of ethnography and/or narrative analysis. In this regard, the active interview process provides us with a practical, step-by-step mechanism by which researchers can move beyond the traditional orientation to interviewing and thus effectively hold true to the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of the modern interpretivist movement.

Critiques and concerns about the epistemological aspects of interview occasion are not new to the social sciences. For decades, scholars have struggled to refine the face-to-face interviewing process in a way that will best assure scientific rigor and quell questions about validity and reliability. Many classic scholars pursued avenues of interpretive thought (See for example Mead 1934; Goffman 1959; Garfinkel 1967; Blumer 1969). Some have even argued in favor of more reflexive and situational conceptions of meaning negotiation. During the recent past, feminist methodologists have placed an emphasis on more reflexive and situational understandings in the social sciences (See Reinharz 1992). And the post-modernist and post-stucturalists have pursued narrative analysis techniques with earnest as of late (Riessman 1993). However, few have been willing and/or able to provide a functional alternative. This is precisely what Holstein and Gubrium aim to accomplish.

Holstein and Gubrium (1995) begin their discussion by summarizing several popular approaches to face-to-face interviewing. They start by outlining what they call the "survey interviewing" approach. This approach, which they associate with the work of Converse and Schuman (1974), applies positivistic survey research ideas to face-to-face interviewing. Holstein and Gubrium assert that students of the survey interviewing tradition treat the interview respondent as a "vessel-of-answers" (Holstein & Gubrium 1995 8). That is, the researcher assumes that the respondent is:

> epistemologically passive, not engaged in the production of knowledge. If the interview process goes 'by the book' and is non-directional and unbiased, respondents will validly emit what subjects are presumed to merely hold within them—the unadulterated facts and details of experiences under consideration. (Holstein & Gubrium 1995 8)

It is important at this point to note that the survey interviewing approach's emphasis on a passive interview subject leaves no room for him/her to engage in the construction or negotiation of meaning. He/she is simply left to provide their unbiased reflections on the issue at hand. As such, the "rationally neutral" researcher is charged with the task of manipulating the questions in a way that explores the respondent's "repository of facts" until the required information is located and extracted (Holstein & Gubrium 1995 10). In other words, this process assumes that information held by each subject is sufficiently well understood and anticipated by the researcher, a priori, to allow this researcher to ask all the "right" questions. Conversely, it assumes that the subject will adequately understand the purpose and the nature of all of the researcher's questions to "accurately" answer them (provide his/her understanding of the truth). The active interview, however, does not make these a priori assumptions. Instead, the terms and understandings that emerge during the course of the interview are discussed and developed together as a negotiation between the interviewer and the subject.

Next, Holstein and Gubrium identify what they refer to as the "creative interviewing" tradition. This tradition, which is often credited to and exemplified by the work of Jack Douglas (1985), emphasizes the need for researchers to build rapport with their respondents and to deeply probe their experiences during the interview process. Here, the goal for the interviewer is to uncover the desired substantive material via conversational cunning and stealth. Holstein and Gubrium maintain that the creative interviewing approach

treats the interview respondent as a "well-guarded vessel of feelings" whose "emotional wellsprings" can only be tapped via the hard work, quick thinking, and interpretation of feelings and cues on the part of a more engaging researcher (Holstein & Gubrium 1995 12). Notice, again, that the creative interviewing tradition infers that there are objective meanings (personal reflections of the "truth") that lay within the outer shell of the respondent. The interviewer is thus charged with the task of uncovering such meanings from amidst the often confusing emotional fabric.

The central focus of both the survey and creative interviewing traditions is fixed on the excavation of substantive information pertaining to the research issue under investigation. As such, all issues related to the content and process of the interview occasion are focused on maximizing the validity and reliability of the information to be obtained (patching together respondents' personal reflections of reality). This methodological focus, by emphasizing content over process, largely ignores the possibility of ongoing meaning production within the interview occasion. Thus, the primary role of the interviewer becomes one of assisting in the excavation process, not fostering interpretive processes. In making this leap of faith, the researcher has all but abandoned the critical underpinnings of the interpretivist tradition.

The post-modernist and post-structuralist movements have gone to great lengths to question the legitimacy of traditional interview-based research efforts. The work of thinkers like Foucault (1979) and Lyotard (1984) or their contemporaries such as Denzin (1997) has called into question our ability to reference the written or spoken word as a means of documenting "reality." Discussions regarding the elusive or "reflexive" nature of scholarly interpretation has given birth to narrative analysis techniques. Here, the researcher steps into the background and allows the respondent to freely express their thoughts and sentiments in a loosely constrained stream of consciousness. Once completed, the researcher does little more than organize excerpts of the interview and provide passing commentary in an effort to minimize his/her bias on the "native's story."

The active interviewing technique seeks to strike a balance between the rigidity of the naturalistic traditions and the passivity of the narrative orientation. In short, it seeks to simultaneously respect and nurture the content and process of the interview occasion. To accomplish this, the active interview approach invites social scientists to consider "what" and "how" questions associated with the interview-based research endeavor (Holstein & Gubrium 1995). *"What" questions* refer to the commonly pursued issues associated with the substantive topic at hand. For example, a researcher who is using interviewing to collect data for a study of sexual abuse in prison would want to know "what" the details of the behavior are. These *"what" questions* are the bread and butter of the naturalistic tradition (survey and creative interviewing) as they direct attention towards offender motives, profiles, rationalizations, etc. and traditionally would be addressed via the structured and/or unstructured interview protocol. *"How" questions*, on the other hand, are more in line with the teachings of the post-modernist and post-structuralist movement (Denzin 1997; Foucault 1979; Lyotard1984) as they focus the researchers energies and attention on the "meaning-making" processes that are an unavoidable facet of all communicative interactions (Holstein & Gubrium 1995 16). Here, the emphasis is placed on the ways in which the interviewer and the respondent negotiate the narrative representation of the research topic within the context of the interview event. This interactional dynamic will be bound to the situation and substantive focus at hand. Referring to the sexual assault example presented above, questions about victim selection would have to be sensitive to the fact that the interviewer and the respondent would likely negotiate and gradually construct shared understandings, narrative linkages, and the narrative products about what constitutes a potential victim for the perpetrator in question. It is likely that he would alter his description of potential victims as he thought about the situation from different perspectives (present day, last month, after breaking up with a particular girlfriend, after being fired by a female boss, etc.).

This conceptually and methodologically progressive idea encourages researchers to broaden their empirical focus and thus move to a contextual level of understanding that far surpasses the conventional approaches to interviewing. For one, the inter-

view occasion is thought to be an observable instance in which two individuals are engaging in a collective meaning making exchange. For example, when interviewing a child molester, one would expect the researcher to query "what" sorts of behaviors and motivations were central to the offender's experiences. However, by using an active interviewing approach, the researcher may be able to illustrate "how" the narrative of these behaviors and perceptions are constructed and conveyed by the subject within the context of and interactional exchange (through language and gestures). This latter distinction is critically different from the former in that it is particularly sensitive to the conversational dynamic and how the individual thinks and talks about the behavior at hand. In effect, the interaction becomes the unit of analysis, not the substantive topic at hand.

An active and thus reflexive view of the interview occasion also has substantial implications for respondent selection. This approach assumes that both the respondent and interviewer can and will take on different positional and substantive roles and pursue different discursive avenues throughout the course of one interview. Thus, the researcher "must consider the question of people representation while maintaining the more traditional concern for sample representativeness" (Holstein & Gubrium 1995 25). The authors suggest that respondent selection should take on a *democratic flavor* that emphasizes the diversity of voices and storytelling potentials in addition to substantive understanding of the topic at hand. In short, researchers are encouraged to take into account the totality of the potential subject's experiences, not just those that are germane to the topic at hand.

The active interviewing approach also has serious implications for how researchers design their interview schedules and implement those schedules via their subsequent interactions with subjects. From the standpoint of the active interview, the interview event is considered as an occasion of where the interviewer and respondent are engaged in *meaning-making work*. It should, therefore, be expected that both the interviewer and respondent will take on and shift into different roles throughout the course of the conversation. This assertion parallels Burke's (1966), Messenger & associates' (1962), and more recently Berg's (2001) idea of dramaturgical research, and is similar to Adler and Adler's (1987) description of the fluidity of roles held by field researchers. However, Holstein and Gubrium move beyond dramaturgy and role shifting. They maintain that both the respondent and interviewer bring a variety of narrative resources into the interview occasion. These include, but are not limited to, one's stock of knowledge on the topic at hand as well as a vast variety of other tangential issues, various verbal and non-verbal discursive strategies, and the potential for what they call "multivocality." Multivocality refers to the ability of both the researcher and subject to self-reflexively move from one social role to another in the course of answering various questions. With every role change, each party will draw from the reservoir of behaviors, knowledge, experiences, understandings, and expectations associated with that role. For instance, in the course of a single interview occasion, a child molester might answer questions from the perspective of a convicted criminal, as somebody's son, as a brother, as an unreliable employee, and so forth. The variety of narrative resources is difficult to predetermine and hence will inevitably be played out during the course of the interview.

This is not to say that the interviewer is defenseless against this situation. Positional shifts can be attributed to the individual's past and present social world. For example, an adult male police officer speaking about the topic of juvenile vandalism might orient to the topic from vastly different perspectives. Namely, he might answer one way when he thinks about the topic from the perspective of a police officer. Then again, he might respond differently if he happens to choose to respond by drawing upon memories from his youth. Similarly, his positional standpoint as a parent of a juvenile son might produce a different response. There are, in fact, a wide range of positional possibilities that can and are adopted by any given individual. As such, the researcher can use respondent background information to anticipate the pending interaction and/or be on the lookout for such shifts during the course of the interaction.

The multivocality proposition raises a series of additional issues when it is applied to the course of the interview event. Namely, if a respondent is capable of drawing on different positional reference points, it is likely that he/she will adopt different voices or positions

during the course of the same interview. In the context of the preceding example, this means that the male police officer will at times be speaking from his perspective as a police officer. At other times, he will likely answer questions from the reference point of a parent. At still other times during the interview, it is possible that he will be speaking with his experiences as a youth in mind. Interview researchers must face the realization that these different perspectives produce different narrative accounts and inevitably disrupt the potential for a simplistic and linear representation of events, attitudes, experiences, etc. Once this realization is achieved, instances of positional shifts must be documented and considered carefully at the analysis stage of the project. Ignoring this situation can significantly compromise the rigor of one's analysis plan and subsequently lead to misguided coclusions.

The active interview approach acknowledges that interview respondents often offer concrete language cues to indicate when they are changing hats (perspectives). For example, they cite generic

> telltale phrases such as 'speaking as a mother', 'thinking like a woman', 'if I were in her shoes', 'after I heard what he said', 'wearing my professional hat', 'on second thought' as being direct evidence of such positional shifts by a respondent. (Holstein & Gubrium 1995 33)

Interviewers, then, must be sensitive to a respondent's positional shifts within an interview. These shifts suggest that the respondent is offering different perspectives on the same topic, hence the researcher is obligated to identify them as such in the subsequent data coding phase of the research. Again, the consequences must be addressed at the data analysis phase.

As a proactive strategy, the active interview can be undertaken with the inclusion of cues built into the interview question schedule. These scheduled cues can actively solicit, and thus better monitor, issues of respondent multivocality. In essence, the researcher can orient each respondent to a given situational perspective through the use of verbal cues such as "how do you see this problem as a: parent, policeman, youth, etc." This strategy would reduce the guess work and, in fact, help bolster traditional notions of validity if the researcher were able to document the transitions. Moreover, this approach to multivocality would present the potential for a coding and analysis plan that could be equally attuned to substantive *"what" questions* as process oriented *"how" questions* in the same research project.

AN EXERCISE IN APPLICATION

At first glance, it could appear that the active interview represents a radical departure from traditional and conventional interviewing styles. If too narrowly framed, Holstein and Gubrium's suggested approach could be construed as a direct challenge to the fabric of interviewing research as it has been practiced by sociologists for decades. For example, one might predict that Lazarsfeld (1965) or other staunch "positivists" might adopt a defensive posture toward the proposed methodology, thus dismissing it on the basis that it is ideologically charged and thus threatening to the status quo. Similarly, proponents of the qualitative camp, from naturalistic ethnographers who follow in the tradition of Whyte (1943) to advocates of more reflexive or interpretive ethnography such as Denzin (1997), might be tempted to say that the active interview adds little to our understanding of interview-based research. They will claim that scholars have long been aware of the sensitive, complex, and challenging nature of face-to-face interviewing. They too may be inclined to dismiss the utility of the active interviewing approach. While this latter group may concede to the epistemological issues posed by the active interview, they will likely choose to close a blind eye on the discussion as the resulting conceptual and methodological ramifications simply seem too daunting and entrenched to overcome.

We concur with Geertz's observation and offer the following cursory application of the active interviewing approach. Our principle goal is to provide an illustration and as food for thought for both groups of skeptics. For the defensive traditionalist, we hope to show that different ideological positions can coexist and educate one another without threatening each other's existence. For the fellow interpretivist who seeks to banter about the pragmatics of qualitative inquiry, we provide this discussion to illustrate yet another way to enhance empirical rigor.

Obviously, our preceding discussion on how the active interview might apply to crime

and deviance warrants further explication via an actual data collection effort. Ideally, this explication would come in the form of a large-scale interviewing project that was expressly designed to explore pertinent *"what"* and *"how"* questions as they apply to a given form of behavior. Unfortunately, we do not have such a project at our disposal. Instead, we have chosen to conduct a small number of interviews (N=6) to illustrate how this innovative new methodology can be applied to the study of crime and deviance. Clearly, the active interview's most significant contribution is the idea that the form of the interview interaction is as important as the content. This is the principal distinction between *"how"* and *"what"* questions. As such, while we recognize the significance of traditional *"what"* questions, we focus the following inquiry on illustrating the way that the *"how"* questions come to manifest themselves within the interview event. Namely, we designed and carried out a series of interviews that are particularly sensitive to the story telling potential of prospective respondents as well as the anticipated multivocality that would follow from respondents' stock of knowledge.

We have chosen to focus the substance of this application exercise on three pressing criminal justice policy issues — recreational drug use, the use of capital punishment, and society's response to violent criminals. These are three issues that are currently at the forefront of political debates and scholarly discussion. We seek to illustrate how discussion and views on these issues are in a large part dictated by the individual's socio-economic background (sampling concerns) and the point of view from which they orient to them (multivocality concerns).

Respondent Selection

Holstein and Gubrium (1995) endorse the use of respondent selection techniques that are equally sensitive to individual-level concerns as they are population concerns. In short, they suggest that the stocks of knowledge of potential respondents are as important as issues of demographic representativeness. The idea is to strike a balance between respondent representativeness and diversity of views and experiences. This can be achieved by thinking more carefully about the way that past experiences impact an individual's views on the subject matter under study.

We submit that this suggestion is particularly pertinent to crime and deviance research. Significant differences in the nature and dynamics of the subject under study (motives, techniques, rationalizations, etc.) often differ substantially from one individual to the next or from one group to the next. For example, Murphy, Waldorf and Reinarman (1990) demonstrated that cocaine dealers, who on the surface appear to carry out very similar criminal lifestyles, actually speak of very different self concepts, motives, rationalizations, and drug use/sale techniques. Murphy and her associates were able to identify these trends because they focused their sampling techniques on individuals, not population parameters. In somewhat more traditional terminology, the democratic sampling strategy proposed by the active interview approach is similar to purposive sampling (Babbie 1998). Thus, the possession of certain types of specialized information or experiences become the primary selection criteria rather than mere concerns of aggregate numbers, or random chance selections. The result is localized data that are invaluable to social understandings of a given phenomenon. More importantly, these data embrace the stocks of knowledge and life experiences of the prospective respondents instead of constructing these factors as instances of sampling bias that justify exclusion from the study. In this spirit, the aforementioned study sought out individuals with experiential histories that made them particularly well suited for the subject matter at hand. At the same time, the researchers were also sensitive to traditional sample representation issues and were thus able to gather demographically diverse groups of respondents.

To illustrate this issue, we purposely selected six individuals with demographically diverse backgrounds but who had aspects of their social histories that would likely influence their attitudes and experiences germane to the topics of study in the present exercise (the death penalty, violent offenders, and drug-related crime).

First, there is Frank (pseudonym), a 21-year old college student (psychology major). He was raised in a traditional, tight-knit, rural household by his working-class parents. He was very close with his two siblings, a brother (26) and sister (23). He has no children but is engaged to be married.

Mark is the second subject. He is a 47-

Table 1 - Respondents' Positional Views on Capital Punishment

Position	Interviewee					
	Frank	Mark	Art	Kelly	Beth	Dana
General	moderate opposition	strong opposition	strong support	moderate support	strong support	moderate support
Parent	strong support	strong opposition	strong support	strong support	strong support	strong support
Sibling	strong support	strong opposition	strong support	strong support	moderate support	strong support
Job Role	strong opposition	strong opposition	strong support	strong support	strong support	strong support
Gendered	moderate opposition	strong opposition	strong support	moderate support	strong support	moderate opposition
Spouse	strong support	strong opposition	strong support	strong support	strong support	strong support

year old male criminal justice professor with a Ph.D. in psychology. He too was raised in a tight-knit rural household by strict working-class parents. He has a younger brother, a 43-year old pharmacist, with whom he maintains a close relationship. Mark has never been married and has no children.

Art is a 49-year old career police officer (24 years on the force). He was raised in an urban household marked by a homemaker mother and a disciplinarian father. He was the oldest of five siblings (two brothers and two sisters). Despite living in the same neighborhood as his entire immediate family, he claimed to rarely visit or speak with them. He has been married for 24 years and has two children (a son, 21 and daughter, 18).

The first of the three females is Dana, a 27-year old salesperson. She was raised in a suburban middle-class household that included a physicist father, homemaker mother, and one older sister. She was very close with her family, and had a serious boyfriend but no children.

Next is Beth, a 42-year old apartment manager. Her parents divorced when she was very young. This resulted in her being raised by her middle-class, hairdresser father in a suburban neighborhood. She was not close with her two older brothers who were raised by her mother in a far away city. She claimed to be happily married for six years and described herself as the proud mother of three pre-teen children.

Finally, there is Kelly, a 45-year old secretary. She was the product of a fairly traditional nuclear, middle-class rural household that included a homemaker mother, systems analyst father and two sisters (35 and 43 respectively). She had been married for 18 years (no children) and she and her husband remained very close with her entire family.

We anticipated that these diverse socio-economic backgrounds would provide us with ample opportunity to explore the possibility that critical differences exist both within individuals and between individuals when it comes to their sentiments on topics such as the death penalty, violent crime, and drug abuse. Namely, we expect that issues such as gender, parental status, employment status, family closeness, and marital status would have a marked impact on how people react to these social issues.

Conversation Issues

Within the context of the active interview, respondent selection issues have a direct and critical implications for the conversational substance of interview. The active interview is oriented towards a venue for meaning-making via narrative negotiations. Interviewers, therefore, must plan for and engage in a much more proactive conversational format. In other words, interviewers should be respectful of the individual's capabilities for engaging in narrative production and even attempt to incite such production. These capabilities and directions will be significantly impacted by the individual's background and resulting stock of knowledge regarding the topic at hand. Once such narrative production begins, the researcher can and should monitor and record how it takes shape and plays itself out. This means that the interviewer should come to view the respondent as a kind of collaborator or storyteller, assisting in the production of scientific understandings. This is somewhat of a radical idea. It suggests that the respondent should be granted agency as a storyteller and thus allowed to expound upon his or her own stock of knowledge while the interviewer attempts to connect this emerging narrative back to the substantive issues of the study. In doing so, the researcher becomes equally concerned with what the respondent is saying and how he or she is saying it.

This suggestion that respondents can and do engage in occasions of multivocality has significant implications for crime and deviance researchers. Positional shifts produce different responses to the same questions or topics. As a result, it becomes necessary to adopt a more comprehensive approach to interviewing. For example, researchers can anticipate the possible voices or positional perspectives that a given research topic is likely to produce.

Several instances of multivocality were observed among the respondents detailed above. Each respondent was asked "In general, how do you feel about the use of capital punishment?" Their responses were coded into one of several general categories. This was followed up by a conversational exercise in which the interviewer specifically asked the respondent to think about the death penalty from a variety of different perspectives (as a parent, as a sibling, from their job role, as a man or woman, and as a spouse). Their responses to each of these positional shifts was then recorded and assigned generic codes. A summary of the results are presented in Table 1.

As expected, the original generic death penalty question prompted a variety of responses from the six subjects. Art and Beth expressed strong support for the death penalty citing its retributive effects. Dana and Kelly supported the death penalty, but wanted it reserved for the most heinous offenders, fearing that overuse would breed mistakes and prejudices. Frank was in favor of the sentence in theory, but opposed its use based on a flawed operational character of the justice system. Mark staunchly opposed capital punishment on moral grounds.

Next, each respondent was asked to think about capital punishment from the perspective of a parent. When speaking to the prospect of seeing a son or daughter fall prey to a capital crime, we observed no change in opinion from the individuals who originally expressed extreme views, namely Art and Beth remained unswayed in their pro-death penalty stance while Mark remained staunchly opposed to its use. However, those individuals with moderate views (Frank, Kelly, and Dana) suddenly became strong advocates when confronted with the loss of a child. Conversely, when asked about their views in light of the possibility that their son or daughter might be named as the perpetrator in a capital offense, only Art thought that he would support the State's decision to seek the death penalty. All of the others suspected that they would seek mercy for their loved ones. In fact, the sole mother in the group, Beth (who originally claimed to be a staunch death penalty supporter), had difficulty even entertaining the possibility that her children would be capable of committing a capital offense. She said:

> I guess that I don't feel as strongly if we are talking about my kids. But I guess I would have to say....um....all people deserve to be punished for that. But if it happened, it would depend on why. Were they defending themselves, the family, or was it because they were crazy? No matter what, I don't see it and I still don't think capital punishment...I just think jail.

We note that a similar trend was observed when we asked the respondents to think

about capital punishment from the perspective of a sibling. That is, those with moderate views on the death penalty tended to call for the supreme sentence in the case of sibling victimizations but oppose it in cases of sibling offending. For example, Frank, who originally professed moderate opposition to the death penalty said:

> Anyone that would harm [my brother or sister] would really have to hide from me...that asshole should die slowly and painfully. And, once again, if it were [my brother or sister as the perpetrator], I would not favor capital punishment for them.

Kelly, who originally verbalized moderate support for the death penalty, had a significantly different take on the issue when forced to think specifically about scenarios that included her siblings. She stated:

> I think that it would have to depend on the crime itself. I think that I would want that person [who killed her sisters] punished. My mother would probably take care of my sisters if they messed up. But no, I would want them to get help because I don't see them as people who deserve to be in the same place as those other criminals. If it's someone in your own family, of course you want them to receive a lesser sentence.

As expected, the data in Table 1 illustrate that one's job seems to have an effect on one's views toward criminal justice policies. It should come as no surprise that the police officer (Art) proved to be an unwavering supporter of capital punishment while the Criminal Justice professor with a Ph.D. in psychology (Mark) proved to be an unwavering opponent on the issue, especially when they were asked to think about the issue from the perspective of their respective jobs. For example, Art stated that:

> they [violent offenders] should be removed from society...as a general rule...You cannot let them out to harm other people no matter who they are...I think that violent criminals who prey upon other people have forfeited their right to coexist with us in society. I have strong feelings toward this.

The same level of dogmatism was observed in Mark's strong anti-death penalty position. He said:

> I don't think that taking a life justifies taking another life. [My position] wouldn't change... The same thing applies. It is never right to take the life of another human being.

Both professions (police officer and criminal justice professor) are intimately familiar with violent crime and violent criminals. This stock of knowledge helps forge dogmatic views on the topic. In the case of the police officer, cynicism tends to lead to conservative, retributive views while exposure to scholarly debate leads most academics to espouse stern liberal or humanistic support for rehabilitation.

Turning to the remaining respondents, we note several additional observations. Frank's moderate opposition for the death penalty quickly turned to staunch opposition when asked to think about the issue as a psychology student, he said: "as a student, after learning what I have about the issue, I would have to say that it is of no value in our society." Kelly, the 45-year old secretary with an MBA was a different story. When forced to think about the death penalty as a secretary, she began to speak like a true corporate bureaucrat. This woman who enlisted principals consistent with the selective incapacitation doctrine as the basis for her moderate support of capital punishment, now began to address cost issues. She spoke of the rising costs of prison expenses and now called for the broader use of the death penalty as a way to deal with:

> those violent people who get off too easy. They get trapped in the system, their cases drag on for years...I do really wish that those people would get what they deserve -- to die, now!

A similar, economically-based cost benefit analysis was espoused by Dana, the 27-year old salesperson. When asked about the death penalty from the perspective of her job, this woman, who originally displayed only moderate support for capital punishment, suddenly turned advocate by stating:

> In sales, we learn that we have to get the most bang for the buck. Sometimes you have to just cut your losses and move on. I know that this is a crass viewpoint but business

Table 2 - Respondent's Positional Views on the Societal Response to Drug Use

	Interviewee/Use History					
Position	Frank No Use	Mark No Use	Art No Use	Kelly Light Use	Beth Heavy Use	Dana Moderate Use
General	Treatment	Treatment	Incapacitate	Treatment	Legal	Treatment
Parent	Punish	Treatment	Punish	Educate	Help	Punish
Sibling	Help	Treatment	Abandon	Educate	Educate	Treatment
Job Role	Treatment	Treatment	Punish/treat	Behavior Modification	Prosecute	Abandon
Gendered	Judge	Treatment	Economic	Treatment	Educate	Treatment
Spouse	Help	Treatment	Abandon	Treatment	Treatment	Ultimatum

is business.

As each of the above statements illustrates, an individual's view about the death penalty underwent slight to severe changes depending upon what stock of knowledge they were instructed to reference. We concede that there is a great deal of research (see Fox, Radelet & Bonsteel 1990 for a general overview) that demonstrates how individuals' attitudes toward the death penalty can be influenced by the subject matter contained in pencil and paper survey questions (asking vague questions vs. questions that specify sentencing options). However, as we have shown above, the subject matter of the questions are not the only important factor that researchers need to be taking into account. The prospect of multiple viewpoints or positions within a given respondent is also of significant concern.

An individual's views toward the death penalty are an easy target for the maxims of the active interview — of course people can be made to think and speak in a variety of manners about such an abstract and emotionally charged issue. This is an issue that only a small fraction of the general public has any direct exposure to, thus we are prone to varied and transient opinions. At this point, let us turn our attention to a criminal justice issue that a far greater segment of the population can directly relate to — illicit drug use. First we asked each respondent to detail their drug use history. We categorized the responses in general categories (see Table 2). Next, each respondent was asked: "In general, what do you think should be done with people who abuse drugs?" As with the first example, the initial topical question was followed-up by a conversational exercise in which the interviewer specifically instructed the respondent to think about the appropriate societal response to illicit drug use from a variety of different perspectives (as a parent, as a sibling, from their job role, as a man or woman, and as a spouse). Their responses to each of these positional shifts was then recorded and coded. A summary of these findings is presented in Table 2.

Again we observe support for the assertion that interviewer-imposed positional shifts and the respondent's stock of knowledge can and do impact the conversational content of the interview. Much as was the case with the death penalty questions, we note

that one's long term membership in a given profession can yield dogmatic views on those topics that are part and parcel of the daily work of that professional. As a criminal justice professor, Mark is well versed in the drug treatment literature and thus leaves him an unwavering advocate of drug treatment. Conversely, as a police officer who is continuously reminded of the drug use/crime nexus, Art calls drug use "the scourge of this country" and advocates a variety of punitive measures in what he sees as an "all out war against drugs."

Notice how the three respondents with past drug use histories (Kelly, Beth and Dana) exhibit fluid and changing attitudes when suggesting what society should do with drug abusers. Kelly, who admitted to occasional marihuana use as a teenager takes a treatment/education view of the problem. It appears that her limited experience and successful cessation has left her believing that drug users can change or be changed. Dana, who used drugs on a monthly basis during college is even more fluid in her views. In general, she condones treatment, however, when the drug abuse is viewed from a parental or spousal perspective, she insists that strong will can overcome the problem. When asked about how she would respond to drug abuse in her future spouse, she said:

> I would like to think that I could help him overcome that. I mean, together, we could come together and somehow beat it without turning to the outside world.

Finally, we turn to Beth. She described weekly drug use during the major part of her 20's but claims to be drug free for over 15 years. Using drugs in what she deemed "the hippie generation," she exhibits liberal attitudes toward drug abuse saying that "we probably should legalize pot and some of the other lesser drugs, everyone is going to do it anyways." She clearly recognizes the dangers of drugs (especially when it effects those close to her) but is unwilling to support society's right to punish drug users. In short, the sentiments from her hippie days may not be completely behind her.

LESSONS FOR THE CRIME AND DEVIANCE RESEARCHER

The summary data presented in Tables 1 and 2 are intended to illustrate the active interview in action. Granted, we have chosen some mundane criminal justice topics and applied them to an even more limited sample. However, the data unmistakably illustrate how positional shifts and respondents' stock of knowledge shape interview content. These are critical issues that must be considered more closely in future crime and deviance research. We offer the following suggestions as to how researchers might better implement the maxims of the active interview on a wider basis.

At a minimum, the researcher should tailor his/her interview guide in such a way that it probes for various positional perspectives. For example, let us say that a researcher plans to ask college students about their drug use behaviors. The researcher can anticipate that the subjects are likely to shift their positional responses from at least those of a largely law abiding and judgmental citizen, to that of a weekend indulgent partier. One might additionally anticipate that the student subjects' situational positions may include those of sons and daughters, siblings, and perhaps parents.

Certainly, there may be some potential for respondents to excuse or avoid their "darker side" or deviant behaviors. Moreover, there will be various shifts from one situational position to another depending upon the contours of the questions and the non-verbal interactions between the researcher and the subject. Researchers, especially those engaged in crime and deviance research, must be prepared to use conversational cues to explicitly orient their respondents to a chosen positional perspective. This proactive positionality can be applied to both deviant and non-deviant perspectives. If the researcher expects that his/her respondents will be tempted to speak as college students, he/she should not simply sit back and wait for it to happen. The researcher should prompt the respondent by saying things like "how do you see that as a college student..." or "what about when you are out with your friends on the weekend..." Also, the interviewer should be prepared to ask for clarification from the respondent. This may mean asking them to specify which perspective is conversationally active after a given response.

This proactive conversational strategy should allow crime and deviance researchers to better ascertain how and why their respondents orient towards their deviant be-

haviors. Moreover, this approach should allow the researcher who is doing research on active or known offenders (instead of crime-related attitudes as is the case above) to better demonstrate how neutralizations, rationalizations, and accounts of such behaviors are differentially applied and used by subjects in their social worlds.

Admittedly, an approach to interviewing that is sensitive to or anticipates incidents of respondent multivocality makes for a much longer interview conversation and significantly complicates data analysis issues. Nonetheless, if used proactively, or if at least considered as an additional sensitizing tool within the context of the interview conversation, it can and will make for more comprehensive findings and understandings of whatever topic is under consideration.

An active interviewing approach also stresses the importance that non-conversational aspects of the interview occasion can be in influencing the resulting narrative accounts. For example, the general interview setting, the existing props within the setting, the appearance of the interviewer, and presence of other individuals (in addition to the interviewer and the respondent) can have a significant impact on the interview conversation (Holstein & Gubrium 1995). These are issues that are often overlooked in crime and deviance research. Often researchers jump at the opportunity to talk to hard to reach deviant populations, and ignore the impact that constraining non-conversational factors have on the research. For example, given the fact that self report data from active offenders is generally difficult to obtain, researchers often choose to sample incarcerated offenders. This sampling approach requires the interviews to be conducted in a prison or jail setting. Because of various pressures that the prison experience exerts upon an individual, it is entirely possible that an inmate's conversations with a social science researcher will be affected. Thus, the paranoid and hostile climate may affect the way that the individual conceives of structured discussions, their criminal history, and likely every other aspect of their past and present existence.

In the active interview, the researcher could intentionally invoke changes in the subject's situational position. For example, the researcher might first ask, "How do you feel about issues A, B & C?" Next, the researcher might ask, "How did you feel about A, B & C before going to prison?" The researcher might subsequently ask about A, B & C from other intentional situational positions. By altering these situational positions, and giving explicit cues to the subject about which position to take, the researcher can tap into the multivocality of the interview process.

Crime and deviance researchers who conduct interviews in prison settings rarely consider the implications that the prison setting has on the resulting interviews. Similarly, researchers in other settings are not likely to consider the impact that the nuances of their setting may have on the interview process. For example, research conducted in any institutional setting will inevitably shape the tone and content of the conversation. Also, interviews conducted on the streets or in the "native" settings of the respondents will shape various aspects of the conversation. Even interviews conducted in what may be considered the *safety* of a university office will likely affect the conversational flow. Numerous researchers (Cromwell, Olson & Avary 1991; Decker, Wright, Redfern & Smith 1993; Jacobs & Wright 1999; Murphy et al 1990; Weaver & Carroll 1985) have taken to interviewing active street offenders in their natural environment and have found this approach to produce vastly different findings than have been generated from samples of incarcerated individuals. In short, we must be aware that the conversational element of any interview will inevitably be shaped by the setting in which it takes place. Researchers should be more sensitive to this situation and better plan for and discuss the implications that can be produced. Nowhere in social science research is this more apt than in crime and deviance research where sensitive research topics are the order of the day.

It is also important to note that the appearance of the researcher can have a significant impact on the interviewer conversation. This is particularly telling in crime and deviance research where rapport plays such a significant part in respondent disclosure. Beyond conventional notions of rapport, appearance and non-verbal behaviors of the interviewer can have a significant impact on the narrative negotiation of the interview occasion (Holstein & Gubrium 1995). Crime and deviance researchers need to become more aware of their physical appearance, attire,

and body language. All of these can be reflexively used to enhance the conversational environment of the interview. On the other hand, failure to adequately consider these elements could negatively affect the research process and results.

CONCLUSION

If crime and deviance researchers are to benefit from the notion of an active interview, they must take a hard look at the reasons behind why they choose to conduct face-to-face interview research as well as the specific implementation of certain methodologies. An active interview allows researchers to realize that there is much to be learned from subjects than sterile answers to stark questions.

The prospect of an active interviewing approach represents a conceptual and methodological bridge between positivistic and interpretive social science orientations. This bridge permits interview researchers to emphasize the traditional substantive *"what" questions* commonly associated with traditional research designs. At the same time, however, the active interview additionally considers the ways by which respondents construct their substantive understandings of the topic under study. In effect, the active interview permits one to address *"how" questions*. This epistemological and methodological compromise allows the researcher to more fully understand the topic, while simultaneously respecting the narrative resources of the respondents. Furthermore, this approach permits a more reflexive and self-reflexive conversational interaction between the interviewer and his or her subjects.

Perhaps even more importantly, Holstein and Gubrium (1995) offer us a practical application of their ideas. Even if researchers do not agree with their epistemological underpinnings, there is much that can be gleaned from the methodological suggestions that focus on more progressive orientations to respondent selection, narrative construction within the interview occasion, multivocality, and the importance of non-conversational aspects of interviewing.

REFERENCES

Adler P & P Adler 1987 *Membership Roles in Field Research* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Babbie E 1998 *The Practice of Social Research* 8th ed Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Berg BL 2001 *Qualitative Research for the Social Sciences* 4th ed Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Burke K 1966 *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method* Berkeley, CA: U California Press.

Blumer H 1969 *Symbolic Interactionism* Berkeley, CA: U California Press.

Cicourel AV 1964 *Method and Measurement in Sociology* Glencoe, IL: Free Press.

Converse JM & H Schuman 1974 *Conversations at Random: Survey Research as Interviewers See It* NY: John Wiley.

Cromwell PJ, JN Olson & DW Avary 1991 *Breaking and Entering: An Ethnographic Analysis of Burglary* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Decker S, R Wright, A Redfern & D Smith 1993 A woman's place is in the home: Females and residential burglary *Justice Qtrly* 10 1 143-161.

Denzin NK 1997 *Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices for the 21st Century* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

——. 1998. The new ethnography *J Contemp Ethnography* 27 3 405-415.

Dingwall R 1998 A model for challenging sociology or just microsociology? *J Contemp Ethnography* 27 3 399-404.

Douglas JD 1985 *Creative Interviewing* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Foulcault M 1979 *Discipline and Punish* NY: Vintage.

Fox JA, ML Radelet & J Bonsteel 1990 Death penalty opinion in the post-Furman years *NY U Rev Law & Social Change* 18 499-528.

Garfinkel H 1967 *Studies in Ethnomethodology* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Geertz C 1973 Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture. In *The Interpretation of Cultures* (pp. 3-30) NY: Basic Books.

Glaser BG & AL Strauss 1967 *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* Chicago: Aldine.

Goffman I 1959 *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Gubrium JF & JA Holstein 1997 At the border of narrative and ethnography *J Contemp Ethnography* 28 5 561-573.

Holstein JA & JF Gubrium 1995 *The Active Interview* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Jacobs BA & R Wright 1999 Stick-up, street culture, and offender motivation *Criminology* 37 1 149-173.

Lazarsfeld P 1965 *The Language of Social Research* NY: Free Press.

Lyotard JF 1984 *The Post-Modern Condition: A Report on Knowlegde* Minneapolis: U Minnesota Press.

Mead GH 1934 *Mind, Self and Society* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Messenger SL, H Sampson & RD Towne 1962 Life as theater: Some notes on the dramaturgical approach to social reality *Sociometry* 25 1 98-110.

Murphy S, D Waldorf & C Reinarman 1990 Drifting and dealing: Becoming a cocaine seller *Qualitative Sociol* 13 2 287-308.

Reissman C K 1993 *Narrative Analysis* Beverly Hills: Sage.

Reinharz S 1992 *Feminist Methods in Social Sciences* NY: Oxford U Press.

Silverman D 1993 *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analyzing Talk, Text and Interaction* London: Sage.

Weaver FM & JS Carroll 1985 Crime perceptions in a natural setting by expert and novice shoplifters *Social Pyschology Qtrly* 48 4 249-359.

Whyte WF 1943 *Street Corner Society* Chicago: U Chicago Press.