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Qualitative Interviews: A Methodological Discussion of the Interviewer and Respondent Contexts

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Qualitative Interviews: A Methodological Discussion of the Interviewer and Respondent Contexts

Shannon M. Oltmann

Key words: interview; telephone; face-to-face; qualitative research

Abstract: Interviews are a staple method used in qualitative research. Many authors hold face-to-face interviews to be the gold standard, or the assumed best mode in which to conduct interviews. However, a large number of research projects are based on conducting interviews via telephone. While some scholars have addressed the advantages and disadvantages of using telephones to conduct interviews, this work is scattered across multiple disciplines and lacks a cohesive, comprehensive framework. The current article seeks to rectify this gap in the literature, by explicitly developing the constructs of the interviewer context and the respondent context. By examining key components in each of these contexts, the qualitative interviewer can make an informed, reflective decision about the best interview mode to use for a particular project.

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1. Introduction

Qualitative interviews have long been an essential research method. The interview has been called the primary method used in qualitative research (BURNARD, 1994; DOODY & NOONAN, 2013; MYERS & NEWMAN, 2007; RYAN, COUGHLAN & CRONIN, 2009; SCHULTZE & AVITAL, 2011) and "the most direct, research-focused interaction between research and participant" (KAZMER & XIE, 2008, p.258; see also KVALE, 1996). In the qualitative paradigm, interviews are often seen as one of the best ways to "enter into the other person's perspective" (PATTON, 2002, p.341; see also CISNEROS-PUEBLA, FAUX & MEY, 2004) and develop "thick descriptions of a given social world analyzed for cultural patterns and themes" (WARREN, 2002, p.85). [1]

As a research method, interviews have been written about extensively for several decades (e.g., KALEKIN-FISHMAN, 2002). However, there is a curious juxtaposition between interviews as written about, and interviews as performed in the course of research. The vast majority of writing about interview research methods states that interviews should be conducted face-to-face or simply assumes that they will be done in this mode. For example, SEIDMAN (1998,

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p.40) states that the only reason to use the telephone is to set up a time to meet face-to-face with respondents. GERSON and HOROWITZ (2002), MERRIAM (2009), and PATTON (2002) all describe the process of interviewing, including the steps of gathering a tape recorder, sitting down with the respondent, and taking notes on nonverbal cues as the interview progresses. Clearly, they picture the interview solely as a face-to-face experience, as these steps would not be possible otherwise. VOGL (2013) summarized that "telephone interviews are often dismissed" (p.134). [2]

In the past three decades, however, interviewing by telephone has become increasingly common. The telephone as an appropriate mode for qualitative interviewing has gained in popularity as evidenced through the relevant literature, in which there are scores of articles based on telephone interviewing (as well as other modes, such as Skype, VoIP [Voice over internet protocol], and e-mail). [3]

HOLT (2010), MILLER (1995), OPDENAKKER (2006), STURGES and HANRAHAN (2004), and VOGL (2013), and others experimented with the use of the telephone as an interviewing mode and determined that it produced comparable results to face-to-face interviewing. Yet, as NOVICK (2008) noted, many of these authors "implied that the use of the telephone could undermine quality when reporting that telephones were substituted for face-to-face interviews only when necessary" (p.394). In other words, most of the scholars who have examined telephone interviewing have been concerned with whether it can "stand in" for face-to-face interviewing, rather than explicitly recognizing that telephone interviewing might have its own unique merits (for an exception, see VOGL, 2013). [4]

HOLT (2010) argued that "the idea that the telephone (or indeed other technologies) may be as useful or perhaps *more appropriate* for the production of narrative data has been left unexplored" (p.114). LECHUGA (2012), however, concluded that "the many qualities that define successful qualitative interviews do not require the interviewer and respondent to be in view of each other" (p.266). Furthermore, "many of the disadvantages and advantages claimed for telephone interviewing seem to relate not to the medium itself but to the manner in which it is employed in social research, and would seem to apply equally to any interview" (TAYLOR, 2002, p.22). [5]

There is some extant literature which explicitly discusses the reasons that telephone interviews were conducted (e.g. HOLT, 2010; STURGES & HANRAHAN, 2004; SWEET, 2002; VOGL, 2013); there are also a few papers which discuss the choices or trade-offs between face-to-face and telephone interviews (GLOGOWSKA, YOUNG & LOCKYER, 2011; LECHUGA, 2012; STURGES & HANRAHAN, 2004; VOGL, 2013). However, there is little structure to this discussion. Researchers tend to consider a few advantages or disadvantages, without a unifying perspective, focusing only on the few elements that were relevant to their research. In addition, the discussion of face-to-face versus telephone interviewing modes is scattered across multiple disciplines. [6]

The current article seeks to rectify these weaknesses in the literature by presenting an explicit, comprehensive framework within which to evaluate the merits of face-to-face and telephone interviewing modes. It is argued that the decision about interview mode should be made carefully and thoughtfully, with appropriate consideration to both the interviewer context and the respondent context. As RYAN et al. (2009) noted, "it is pertinent that the type of interview is congruent with the research question and aims and objectives of the study" (p.310). [7]

Interviews are "seen as negotiated accomplishments of both interviewers and respondents that are shaped by the *contexts* and situations in which they take place" (FONTANA & FREY, 2000, p.663, my emphasis). This article suggests that the contextual elements of different interview modes should be explicitly recognized and thoughtfully addressed by researchers (extending and refining the argument suggested by VOGL, 2013). Essentially, I am arguing for researchers to consider context as they make decisions about research design and implementation. There have been previous calls for researchers to "take a more reflexive stance toward their craft by considering the contextual details of the interview setting and process" (SCHULTZE & AVITAL, 2011, p.2; see also MYERS & NEWMAN, 2007); this article provides the framework through which such reflexivity can occur. In the following sections, I describe components of the interviewer context and the respondent context, explaining how various factors may affect interviews. [8]

2. The Interviewer Context

In this section, several factors that may play a role in such a decision are discussed (see Table 1). For the first time, they are linked together explicitly, as the interviewer context. These are factors which impact interviewers and which should be considered as the decision of interview mode is made.

Time and financial costs
Geographical distribution of respondents
Sensitive or controversial topics
Technology problems
Interviewer safety
Note taking
Interaction effects
Non-verbal language and cues

Table 1: Components of interviewer context [9]

Perhaps the clearest components of interviewer context are time and financial costs. Several authors note that face-to-face interviewing can accrue substantial time and financial expenses, due to the need to travel to respondents, as the universal advice is to make the respondent comfortable by conducting the

interview in a location of their choosing (DOODY & NOONAN, 2013; HAY-GIBSON, 2009; MALTA, 2009; MINICHIELLO, ARONI & HAYS, 2008; OPDENAKKER, 2006). [10]

Telephone interviewing likely reduces these costs (ADAMS, KHAN, RAESIDE & WHITE, 2007; CARR & WORTH, 2001; CHAPPLE, 1999; DINHAM, 1993; GARBETT & McCORMACK, 2001; IRVINE, DREW & SAINSBURY, 2012; LECHUGA, 2012; NOVICK, 2008; PRIDEMORE, DAMPHOUSSE & MOORE, 2005; STURGES & HANRAHAN, 2004; VOGL, 2013). First, the time needed to travel is eliminated (ELMIR, SCHMIED, JACKSON & WILKES, 2011). This led TRIER-BIENIEK (2012) to describe telephone interviews as "a more time-efficient and researcher-friendly tool for conducting interviews" (p.630). Second, telephone costs may not be paid directly by the interviewer but instead by an academic department, corporation, or grant. Third, several researchers suggest that telephone interviews may be somewhat shorter than face-to-face interviews, reducing the time cost (GARBETT & McCORMACK, 2001; IRVINE, 2011; SHUY, 2002; STEPHENS, 2007; SWEET, 2002; *contra*, see STURGES & HANRAHAN, 2004 and VOGL, 2013). IRVINE (2011) found that the difference in length was due to less respondent speech in the telephone mode, though VOGL (2013) found no substantive differences in her research. [11]

Another significant aspect of the interview context is the geographical distribution of respondents. Often, face-to-face interviews are limited to a local geographical area, due to the time and financial constraints described above (MINICHIELLO et al., 2008; SWEET, 2002). Therefore, interviewing by telephone can often extend the geographical range (and diversity) of respondents (ADAMS et al., 2007; DINHAM, 1993; GLOGOWSKA et al., 2011; HOLT 2010; KNOX & BURKARD, 2009; NOVICK 2008; SMITH, 2005; STURGES & HANRAHAN, 2004; WILSON & EDWARDS, 2003). Interviewing can be expanded to national or even international areas (FULTON, 2009; MILLER, 1995). OPDENAKKER (2006) noted that telephone interviews can be beneficial for wide geographical access, for hard to reach populations (TAUSIG & FREEMAN, 1988; WILSON & EDWARDS, 2003), for dangerous or politically sensitive areas, and for access to closed sites such as hospitals or prisons. Furthermore, "interacting from separate physical locations can be more convenient for both parties, letting each stay in a familiar and safe environment" (KAZMER & XIE, 2008, p.265). [12]

Sometimes research addresses particularly sensitive or controversial topics; these often form important, engaging, and valuable research questions, but securing honest, detailed contributions from respondents may be difficult. PRIDEMORE et al. (2005) noted that "selecting the appropriate survey mode is crucial since privacy has an effect on response bias when asking questions about sensitive information or socially undesirable behaviors" (p.977). These research questions have the potential to be embarrassing or awkward, which may make them particularly difficult to discuss in a face-to-face setting (DOODY & NOONAN, 2013; VOGL, 2013). Several researchers have suggested that the awkwardness may be reduced in telephone interviews, due to an increase in social distance (CARR & WORTH, 2001; DINHAM, 1993; GLOGOWSKA et al.,

2011; IRVINE et al., 2012; LECHUGA, 2012; MEALER & JONES, 2014; TAUSIG & FREEMAN, 1988). SMITH (2005), however, stated that this remains somewhat unclear, and CHAPPLE (1999) suggested that this varied depending upon the topic. MALTA (2009) noted that her research was better able to "cover sensitive topics with more perceived anonymity" via telephone interviews (§8). Likewise, DINHAM (1993) suggests that there is "less threat posed by [a] 'faceless researcher'" in telephone interviews (p.25). [13]

Technology problems are somewhat more likely with telephone interviews, as there is simply more technology involved. Calls may be dropped or may have poor sound quality, for example. There may be difficulties determining how to record the telephone call. STEPHENS (2007) reported that "holding the telephone introduced more unanticipated problems" than any other aspect of the interviews, due to the complexities of juggling the telephone, a writing implement, paper, and a drink. The concern that participants may not be familiar with telephone technology, however, has been greatly alleviated in the past two decades (CARR & WORTH, 2001; NOVICK, 2008). In face-to-face interviewing, technology problems would likely result from problems with the recording device (KAZMER & XIE, 2008). Extraneous noise (such as lawn mowing or a television) can affect both modes (ibid.). [14]

Interviewer safety is often overlooked in discussions of qualitative interviews, but it may be of particular concern, depending on the research questions. As some researchers note, interviewer safety may be endangered in a face-to-face interview, depending on the location and time of the meeting (WILSON, 2012). Such danger can include sexual harassment or impropriety (WILSON, ROE & WRIGHT, 1998). In contrast, telephone interviews typically have less potential for danger, as interviews can be conducted from a known safe location, such as the interviewer's office or home (SHUY, 2002; STURGES & HANRAHAN, 2004). [15]

Many qualitative research texts recommend note-taking[1] to supplement audio recording of an interview. In the face-to-face mode, notes can be used to capture nonverbal elements of the interview. However, note-taking may be obtrusive and distracting to the respondent (KNOX & BURKARD, 2009). In contrast, note-taking will be unobtrusive during a telephone interview (NOVICK, 2008; STURGES & HANRAHAN, 2004; SWEET, 2002), as the respondent cannot see the note-taking (though some researchers note that concentrating on a telephone call and taking notes at the same time can be difficult; STEPHENS, 2007). [16]

There are also interaction effects to consider (DOODY & NOONAN, 2013; KNOX & BURKARD, 2009; RYAN et al., 2009; TIETEL, 2000). WILSON et al. (1998) note that "face-to-face interviews are particularly prone to the problems of reactivity, in that respondents may express socially acceptable, rather than authentic, attitudes" and responses (p.315). The observable characteristics of the interviewer, such as class, race, and gender, may influence the respondent.

1 Some methodologists oppose recording interviews. For example, in grounded theory research, interviews are usually not recorded; instead, the researcher relies on extensive notes taken during and immediately after each interview (GLASER & STRAUSS, 1967).

These issues, of course, are much less evident in telephone interviews (TAYLOR, 2002). HOLT (2010), however, suggested that "the lack of more tangible information [such as race, class, or gender markers] to enable the participants and researchers to orient towards each other may be an issue" (p.116). [17]

Finally, interviewers should consider the capture of nonverbal language as another element of interviewer context (though the importance of nonverbal language will vary from project to project). In the face-to-face mode, nonverbal language and cues can be very rich, including dress, body language, mannerisms, and so on. As OPDENAKKER (2006) noted, these aspects "can give the interviewer a lot of extra information that can be added to the verbal answer of the interviewee" (§7; see also ADAMS et al., 2007; CHAPPLE, 1999; GARBETT & McCORMACK, 2001; GENOVESE, 2004; MALTA, 2009; SHUY, 2002; WILSON, 2012). There will be more nonverbal data to collect in the face-to-face mode, though this nonverbal data can be ambiguous, leading to misinterpretation. BURNARD (1994) explained that "'body language' or non-verbal aspects of behaviour is [sic] not so easily interpreted as is sometimes supposed and it is tempting to 'read in' meaning to other people's behaviour" (p.68; see also IRVINE et al., 2012; NOVICK, 2008; TAUSIG & FREEMAN, 1988). [18]

In the telephone mode, most types of nonverbal language are inaccessible (OPDENAKKER, 2006; see MEALER & JONES, 2014, for a description of four types of nonverbal communication, two of which are lost in the telephone mode). Interviewers may still make note of pauses, tone of voice, and similar paralanguage cues (MEALER & JONES, 2014; STURGES & HANRAHAN, 2004; TAYLOR, 2002). For example, TAUSIG and FREEMAN (1988) noted that "the telephone interviewer relied heavily on such discernible auditory cues as verbal tension or anger, manifested by sarcasm, curt responses, slowed speech, difficult articular, sadness, tears, or rapid, compulsive speech" and "silence at times indicated thoughtfulness or signaled anger, depression, or other discomfort" (p.424). Overall, though, there will be much less nonverbal language in telephone interviews and less ambiguous data that can be misinterpreted (LECHUGA, 2012). NOVICK (2008) noted that much qualitative research relies heavily on transcripts and nonverbal data "may not actually be used" (p.395). HOLT (2010) also explained that the lack of nonverbal cues "means that, unlike in face-to-face interactions, *everything* had to be articulated by both the participants and myself. This need for full articulation meant that a much richer text was produced" for analysis (p.116; see also VOGL, 2013). [19]

These components are summarized in Table 2. As this table illustrates, one mode is not necessarily superior to the other when considering the interviewer context. Both face-to-face and telephone interviewing have their strengths and weaknesses. Researchers should select the interview mode most appropriate and useful for their particular project, based on which contextual components are most important and relevant.

Components	**Face-to-face (F2F) mode**	**Telephone mode**
Time and financial costs	Usually intensive; travel may add to costs	Can be less time intensive than F2F; lower costs (no travel)
Geographical distribution	Often limited geographically to local area	National and international access possible and easier
Sensitive or controversial topics	May be difficult in F2F; potential to be embarrassing or awkward	May be less awkward than F2F
Technology problems	Less likely to have problems, except with recording device	Calls can be dropped; possible recording problems
Interviewer safety	Can be endangered depending upon location and time of meeting	Low danger; interviews can be made from office, home, or other location as appropriate
Note taking	Can be obtrusive; can capture non-verbal language and cues	Can be done unobtrusively; may present logistical problems juggling multiple items
Nonverbal language and cues	Usually very rich; can include dress, body language, mannerisms, etc.; more data to be interpreted; can be misinterpreted	Most types unavailable; can note pauses, hesitations, etc.; less information, but less potential bias and misinterpretation

Table 2: Summary of interviewer context for two interview modes [20]

3. The Respondent Context

In addition to the interviewer context, there are several other factors, centered on the respondents, which ought to be considered when determining the most appropriate interview mode for a particular research project. SHUY (2002) correctly noted that "most of the research on interviewing has concentrated on the interviewer rather than on the respondent ... very little is said about respondents' language and comfort" (p.538). This section rectifies the gap in the literature by paying explicit attention to the respondent context. As KNOX and BURKARD (2009) argued, "participant characteristics also influence the actual interview process and relationship" (p.570). Here, the most salient components, as identified in the literature, are discussed (see Table 3).

Scheduling
Respondent anonymity
Privacy / invasiveness
Stigmatized/ marginalized groups
Sensitive or controversial topics
Respondent empowerment

Table 3: Components of respondent context [21]

Scheduling the interview—at an amenable time and location—is often particularly important to respondents (ELMIR et al., 2011). In the face-to-face mode, participants may feel some social pressure to be available and to meet at the agreed-upon time and place. In turn, this may yield a lower no-show rate (SHUY, 2002). Telephone interviews may be easier to reschedule, which respondents may favor (NOVICK, 2008). In TRIER-BIENIEK's (2012) research, women who were working or taking care of young children were able to schedule brief times for a telephone interview that may not have been possible with face-to-face interviews. TRIER-BIENIEK noted that conducting telephone interviews "was opening up opportunities for those women to participate who may not have had the time or ability to participate had the interviews been in person" (p.635). Scholars generally agree there is less social pressure with the telephone, making it easier to reschedule—but also easier to cancel (or to just not answer the telephone; BURKE & MILLER, 2001). Therefore, the telephone interviewing mode may have a higher dropout rate. Some writers have also said that it may be easier for respondents to avoid time conflicts with telephone interviewing (STURGES & HANRAHAN, 2004). VOGL (2013) noted that "the telephone potentially suggests a greater sense of control over the communication process for respondents" (p.138). [22]

A second contextual component, from the respondent perspective, is confidentiality and anonymity. Anonymity, in a research context, means that either the project does not collect identifying information or the identifying information cannot be linked to subjects' responses. Confidentiality means that researchers may be able to identify individual respondents' responses, but every effort is made to keep this information from anyone not connected to the project. Anonymity is particularly difficult in qualitative research; thus, most research projects focus on providing a high level of confidentiality to respondents. [23]

It is difficult to hide one's identity from the researcher in face-to-face interviews. Confidentiality protections are dependent upon interviewer integrity and data protection methods, as well as the sensitivity with which the interview location was selected. These confidentiality concerns can decrease disclosure from the respondent. Anonymity is not truly possible in a face-to-face mode, as the researcher can view and identify the respondent. [24]

In contrast, with the telephone mode, there is higher confidentiality and anonymity, or at least a *perception* of more anonymity (GLOGOWSKA et al., 2011; LECHUGA, 2012; SWEET, 2002; WILSON et al., 1998). Because the researcher cannot view the respondent, much identifiable information is left uncollected unless it is specifically asked about. Respondents have more control over selecting their location for the interview spot, so they can choose a place from which they can have a telephone discussion with no fear of interference or eavesdropping (NOVICK, 2008; TRIER-BIENIEK, 2012). This perception of stronger anonymity can lead to more disclosure (LECHUGA, 2012; STURGES & HANRAHAN, 2004). [25]

On a related note, many respondents may be concerned about their privacy. Face-to-face interviews may feel more invasive, as they are often conducted in the respondents' home or office (STURGES & HANRAHAN, 2004). In addition, respondents cannot hide their nonverbal language. The use of technology can either raise or reduce surveillance fears, depending upon the respondents. HOLT (2010), for example, suggested that telephone interviews "may at least reduce the intensity of the 'surveillant other' by not intruding" into the respondents' homes (p.115; see also SWEET, 2002; TAUSIG & FREEMAN, 1988). Recording technology, typically used in both face-to-face and telephone interviews, may increase these concerns about surveillance and anonymity. [26]

The context of stigmatized or marginalized groups is difficult to interpret, as well. Face-to-face interviews may be more or less difficult for marginalized groups, depending on social pressures and cues. For example, those who are hard of hearing may find face-to-face interviews more enjoyable (CHAPPLE, 1999; IRVINE, 2011), because they can read the interviewer's lips and nonverbal language to aid in their understanding. Other marginalized groups may feel intimidated by the formality of a face-to-face interview, compared to the more casual use of the telephone (STURGES & HANRAHAN, 2004; TAYLOR, 2002). [27]

Telephone interviews, by increasing physical and social distance between the interviewer and the respondent, may improve responses from marginalized groups (TAYLOR, 2002; TRIER-BIENIEK, 2012). This may make telephone interviews easier for participants with a different primary language (i.e., non-native English speakers, in the US context) (CARR & WORTH, 2011). Individuals who have less mobility may find it easier to participate in a telephone interview rather than traveling to a face-to-face interview (MINICHIELLO et al., 2008). GLOGOWSKA et al. (2011) argued that telephone interviews have "the potential to enfranchise sections of the populations who might otherwise go unheard" (p.26). [28]

Although sensitive and controversial topics were discussed as part of the interviewer context, this component is also part of the respondent context. Interviewers should consider how respondents might feel about answering questions dealing with controversial topics. Respondents in a face-to-face setting may feel uncomfortable or embarrassed addressing sensitive topics (CARR & WORTH, 2011; WILSON et al., 1998). They may feel pressure to conform to

social expectations and may under-report certain behaviors or thoughts. However, SHUY (2002) suggested that "face-to-face interaction compels more small talk, politeness routines, joking, nonverbal communication, and asides in which people can more fully express their humanity" (p.541). He argued that these aspects of face-to-face interviewing will lead to respondents opening up more. [29]

With telephone interviews, the discomfort that some respondents feel in face-to-face settings may be eased due to the social distance (CHAPPLE, 1999; GLOGOWSKA et al., 2011; STURGES & HANRAHAN, 2004; TRIER-BIENIEK, 2012; VOGL, 2013). Respondents may feel less social pressure and thus may answer such questions more accurately and with less bias (DINHAM, 1993; DOODY & NOONAN, 2013; FENIG, LEVAV, KOHN & YELIN, 1993; KAZMER & XIE, 2008; KNOX & BURKARD, 2009). IRVINE (2011) explained that "the greater anonymity and less intensity afforded by a telephone encounter ... might be preferable to participants where topics are of a sensitive nature" (p.203; see also ELMIR et al., 2011; MEALER & JONES, 2014; VOGL, 2013). As a result of her study, VOGL (2013) concluded that "the assumption of less open and honest responses to sensitive questions in telephone interviews could not be supported" (p.156). [30]

Finally, several scholars have touched on various aspects of respondent empowerment, or finding ways to share more power with the respondent. Respondents may feel more empowered in the face-to-face setting, in which they can see and respond to the interviewer (SHUY, 2002). They can recognize when the interviewer is confused, indifferent, or not paying attention, and address these concerns directly (STEPHENS, 2007). On the other hand, the potential loss of face may be stronger in face-to-face interviews, leading to respondents feeling social pressure. There is less chance of loss of face in telephone interviews, which some respondents may find empowering (TAYLOR, 2002; VOGL, 2013). TRIER-BIENIEK (2012) argued that the use of telephone interviews "allows the researcher to re-define relationships between research and participant, particularly when considering the 'sender-receiver' dynamic" (p.631). Similarly, MEALER and JONES (2014) noted that "there is a difference in power between researcher and participant that can be ameliorated through virtual space" (p.35). In addition, as discussed above, telephone interviewing can give respondents a bit more control over scheduling and location (NOVICK, 2008; STEPHENS, 2007; SWEET, 2002). SMITH (2005) added that, in telephone interviews, "the physical appearance of both the interviewer and the subject has less influence, which might help them to feel more at ease and focused on the conversation" (p.36; see also TAUSIG & FREEMAN, 1988). [31]

These components of the respondent context are summarized in Table 4. Again, it is clear that considering the respondent context does not automatically privilege telephone or face-to-face interviewing modes. Rather, the respondent context presents a complicated image of social pressure and expectations. To fully consider the respondent context, interviewers must be aware of how these social pressures may affect their participants. There are few definitive answers here, as

social pressure varies greatly from population to population, group to group, and situation to situation. Reflecting upon respondent context, however, may increase the response rate and the richness of the interviews.

Components	**Face-to-face (F2F) mode**	**Telephone mode**
Scheduling	Participant may feel pressure to be available; may have lower dropout rate	Easier to reschedule via telephone; less social pressure; easier to avoid time conflicts; easier to cancel
Respondent anonymity / confidentiality	Difficult to hide identity from interviewer; anonymity dependent on interviewer integrity and data protection; can decrease disclosure	Perception of higher anonymity; can lead to more disclosure
Privacy / invasiveness	Can be invasive to participant (often in their home/ office); F2F can be less invasive than technology; cannot hide non-verbal language	Can either reduce or increase invasiveness and surveillance fears
Stigmatized / marginalized groups	May be more or less difficult for marginalized individuals, depending on social pressures and cues	By increasing distance from interviewer, may improve responses from marginalized individuals
Sensitive or controversial topics	May be uncomfortable or embarrassing; may conform to social expectations; may under-report	May ease discomfort or awkwardness; may improve accuracy of reporting
Respondent empowerment	Can see and respond to interviewer; social pressure (potential loss of face) more evident in F2F	More control; easier to reschedule; less chance of loss of face

Table 4: Summary of respondent context for two interview modes [32]

4. Discussion

By considering the interviewer and respondent contexts, researchers can more thoughtfully select the most appropriate and useful interview mode. For example, a researcher studying a sensitive topic will want to consider which mode is more likely to yield the type and quality of information she seeks. In both the researcher and the respondent context, we see that potentially awkward or embarrassing topics may be more fruitfully addressed in the telephone mode. [33]

Numerous studies have utilized telephone interviewing, yet very few have reflected upon the decision of which interview mode to use. As this article demonstrates, there are many facets to such a decision. Both the interviewer and the respondent context need to be considered thoughtfully to choose the interview mode that is most appropriate for the research project. For many research projects, telephone interviews may be highly appropriate. Research that studies marginalized groups may benefit from telephone interviews. Research that calls for responses from a large geographical area would likely be more cost effective if conducted via telephone. [34]

This conceptualization of the interviewer and respondent modes can be expanded upon in future research. First, there are several other modes that can be considered, including e-mail (CISNEROS-PUEBLA et al., 2004; MEHO, 2006), VoIP (HAY-GIBSON, 2009), video, messaging systems (OPDENAKKER, 2006), text, and so on. Computer-mediated interviews, likewise, could benefit from this perspective. Future work can expand upon the work done here, and consider the interview context and respondent context for each of these interview modes. [35]

Other aspects could be studied as well. For example, the issues of data security and data management are quite important but were not addressed in the current literature. It seems that the data security of face-to-face interviews is strong and consistent, dependent upon the physical security precautions taken by the interviewer. For example, the data may be stored on password-protected equipment or kept in locked office equipment. Most data security issues for telephone interviewing are similar, with one exception. Depending upon the technology used, it may be possible to intercept telephone data, thus potentially compromising respondent confidentiality. Further research needs to examine this component of interviewer context. [36]

5. Conclusion

The selection of interviewing mode is frequently made without much explicit forethought. In the current literature, researchers often mention they conducted telephone interviews without explanation of the reasoning for this. However, as this article argues, the interview mode should be thoughtfully considered and evaluated. In particular, researchers should consider both the interviewer context and the respondent context. There are several components to each context, some of which are likely to be more or less salient depending upon the project at hand. By reviewing and thoughtfully considering the interviewer and respondent contexts, researchers can make an informed, thoughtful, defensible selection of interview mode, which should help advance their research projects. [37]

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