

INTERVIEWING

Tim May and Beth Perry

- Interviews yield rich insights into people's biographies, experiences, opinions, values, aspirations and feelings.
- Seven considerations in the process of interviewing include justifying the choice of method, identifying and recruiting interviewees, considering necessary conditions for the process, thinking relationally, building rapport, crafting questions, framing topics and selecting the location for the interview.
- Researchers see interviews as dialogic encounters that construct meaning rather than report on facts. The aim is not to extract data as a disengaged researcher but to engage relationally to understand contexts, meanings, and interpretations.
- Good interview practice requires a reflexive orientation to research – to ensure that researchers are aware of how their own orientations, opinions and positions influence the encounter.

“Interviews are used as a resource for understanding how individuals make sense of their social world and act within it.”

(May and Perry, 2022: 163)



DISCUSS

- What are the essential attributes of a semi-structured and focus group interview and why?
- Do different approaches to interviewing reflect incompatible ways of viewing social reality?
- What trade-offs might there be between ethical values, for instance, anonymity and consent, when interviewing different people, or researching diverse topics?
- Is an interview a topic of social research or a resource for social research? What philosophical perspectives inform this debate?

DO

You are asked to conduct life-history interviews with a group of inmates in a prison.

- What methods would you choose?
- In relation to the seven interviewing prescriptions, what do you think would be the issues you need to consider before, during and after the interviews themselves?