

GUIDELINES FOR INTERPRETIVE INTERVIEW FIDELITY IN MIXED METHODS
RESEARCH WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF A RANDOMIZED CONTROLLED TRIAL

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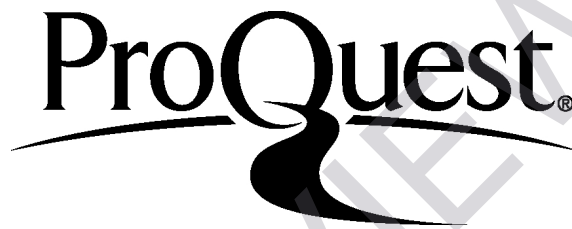
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GUIDELINES FOR INTERPRETIVE INTERVIEW FIDELITY IN MIXED METHODS RESEARCH WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF A RANDOMIZED CONTROLLED TRIAL

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University of Nebraska, 2016

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Interviews fascinate and capture individuals' attention. Researchers value the data they glean from interviews, while participants enjoy being asked to share their voices and opinions. Some of the most complex, stringent research designs are now being revised to include interviews, such as randomized controlled trials. But, how do we know that the interviews that are conducted are valid? We need to know more about how interviews are developed and delivered within the context of intervention research. Therefore, the aim of this methodological dissertation is to create a set of recommendations for interpretive interviews in a mixed methods randomized controlled trial. This dissertation research is part of a larger NIH-funded longitudinal research project on exercise adherence. Through qualitative analysis, dialectical pluralism of research paradigms, and literature on treatment fidelity and validity, the interview fidelity process emerged. Findings indicated five interview fidelity ideals: (1) research contributions, (2) interviewer-participant association, (3) participant accommodation, (4) process and procedures, and (5) data management dimensions. Implications for various research audiences are discussed. Outcomes will assist researchers in processing interviews to encourage and increase validity within the context of intervention trial mixed methods studies and the broader base of all mixed methods studies utilizing interviews.

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I thank my family for believing in me so that I could accomplish this. I wish for my son Konnor to walk his own path.

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PREVIEW

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Problem Statement

We live in an interview society, which values interviewing as a primary mode of information gathering and sharing (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997). Interviews are always around us—in newspapers, on television, and in the infinite repository of all, the Internet. Interviews cut across many fields (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002; King & Horrocks, 2010; Patton, 2015) and journalists communicate with a wide variety of professionals across many disciplines (e.g. political and world leaders, scientists, financial and technology gurus, health professionals) to report the latest news and current events. Interviewers also extend into the entertainment realm, corresponding with willing or unwilling celebrities, athletes, and controversial figures to bring us the latest gossip from the rich, famous, infamous, and those basking in the spotlight for their moments of fame.

The conversational nature of interview encounters makes them a comfortable forum for discussion. Not surprisingly, many individuals have firsthand experience, having taken part in a variety of different types of interviews over the course of their lives: applying for jobs, participating in national polls, attending parent-teacher conferences, getting medical examinations, meeting with financial advisors, or even speed dating.

Interviews are a popular and important research method. This tool is the dominant data collection strategy for qualitative inquiry (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016; Sandelowski, 2002). Interviews are a versatile research tool crossing all research paradigms, theoretical perspectives, and methodologies (Trainor, 2013). In research conducted with a subjectivist epistemology, interviews are often considered to be the gold standard

(Barbour, 2008). In the research literature, interviews are ubiquitous tools. Interviews are as likely to be used as correlational investigations as case studies in mixed methods research.

Interview methods themselves can take different forms depending on their use, ranging from highly structured to semistructured to very loosely formatted (Bernard, 2011; Kelly, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Roulston, 2010; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Silverman, 2006). Interviews have provided investigators with important data across many academic fields, advancing our understanding and providing essential theoretical frameworks. The research benefits of conducting interviews are plenty, particularly if done by an experienced interviewer (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Because interviews are such a central research method, it is vital to conduct them with integrity. However, the validity of interviews has not received sufficient attention in the research literature.

The use of interviews in both mixed methods studies and randomized controlled trials (RCTs) is widespread. Many fields have utilized interviews, particularly interpretive interviews, to illuminate notable research findings and theories (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Merton & Kendall, 1946). The richness and depth as well as the subtlety and nuance gleaned from a participant's story during the interview and analysis demonstrate the importance of this research method.

Interviews also provide key information in mixed methods approaches. As mixed methods continues its expansion across fields, researchers require tools to understand and integrate interviews as a valuable source of data in this framework. Methodologists have called for a modification of methods or tools from a monomethod research conceptualization (usually associated with either qualitative or quantitative data) to a

mixed methods framework (Hesse-Biber & Johnson, 2013; Johnson, McGowan, & Turner, 2010). Interviews span research methodologies but remain complex in their conduct. Little has been written on the topic of interviews within the realm of mixed methods research (Morse, 2012). What exists in the literature focuses generally on interview types and mixed methods research designs, not on the practical level of how to carry out the interviews with fidelity as a part of a mixed methods study (Zohrabi, 2013). Methodologists have called for modifying methods and bringing them into the mixed methods framework as well as increased validation of interviews within the mixed methods context (Hesse-Biber & Johnson, 2013; Johnson & Turner, 2003). Responding to the call and offering some guidance for skillfully conducting quality interpretive interviews within a mixed methods randomized controlled trial framework is the aim of this research.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this dissertation is to advance interview fidelity ideals as a means for conducting interpretive interviews within the context of a mixed methods study. These fidelity constructs were created from a larger project, a longitudinal RCT study of exercise adherence among heart failure patients. Research questions guiding this study about interview fidelity include the following:

1. What are the interview fidelity ideals for Hearts on Track study?
2. How can these interview fidelity constructs be operationalized across multiple paradigms (e.g. postpositivism and constructionism)?
3. How did this researcher navigate between two philosophical perspectives to arrive at a negotiated path for validity or interview fidelity?

4. What is added to the concept of interview fidelity from treatment fidelity standards?
5. What is added to the concept of interview fidelity from the validity literature?

By taking the time to reflect back on the interview process, the researcher (A. Garrett) has a unique opportunity to more critically reflect on the process to assist other researchers and methodologists in achieving interview fidelity.

Audiences Who Will Benefit from Study

Methodological discussion of the fidelity of interviews uplifts the quality of research by providing both researchers and methodologists with an awareness of the ramifications of the decisions made and enacted (or not) during the course of a study. Those working to advance the utility of research as well as those aspiring to improve the quality of content and findings in their research such as those in the health sciences or education, gain from increased thinking about interview fidelity. Understanding the types of considerations and decisions in conducting interviews will help researchers, novice through advanced, glean more authentic data when planning and embarking on new projects. Additionally, by engaging in this research, potential solutions may be available for those already in the midst of an existing project. The opportunity for self-appraisal and continuous improvement is available by reviewing the participant's progress during and after a research study.

Researcher Reflexivity

My education and experience enables me to offer unique insights into the issue of interview fidelity. As a graduate student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in the Educational Psychology Department with specialization in Quantitative, Qualitative, and

Psychometric Methods, I have undergone extensive training and coursework to thoroughly understand approaches to research such as clinical trials and interviews. A focus on validity and quality has always been important to me as a researcher and was a reason I came to study research methods. I have many experiences from which to draw to apply to this work. I have directed and worked in the Office of Qualitative & Mixed Methods Research (1 year, 8 years respectively), worked for the Bureau of Sociological Research and Sociological/Behavioral Sciences Research Consortium (3 years), and consulted for the University of Nebraska Medical Center (4 years).

I consider my personal characteristics and experiences as they relate to the phenomena under study. When I think about who I am as a person and how I relate to others, I quickly come upon my introversion trait. I am one to take in the environment carefully and speak rarely and usually after some time. Personally, I have found my introversion to be a positive attribute when it comes to interviewing. To enjoy listening much more than speaking is a virtue when moderating and guiding an interview. I have found that I am an esteemed company (Cain, 2013; Wolcott, 1990). I also have a healthy skepticism. In the words of Robert Rubin (2004), “Some people are more certain of everything than I am of anything” (Cain, 2013, p. 97). The quest for greater clarity forces me to search out all leads and develop a deep intimacy with the data. Despite my role in the larger RCT as supervisor of the interviewers and qualitative analyst, I do not have close connections with the phenomena of exercise adherence or heart conditions in my life. I do have multiple chronic illnesses. I intimately understand pain, medication issues, and side effects.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

Conceptual Framework

Randomized controlled trials (RCTs). Randomized experimental research is seen as the benchmark for rigorous, scientific research (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). The RCT is expectedly accorded the gold standard with platinum status bestowed upon veins of research where data were gathered from multiple RCTs (Bolton, 2008). RCTs are considered the pinnacle of evidence within health communities such as in evidence-based medicine (EBM) (Devisch & Murray, 2009; Grossman, 2008).

Randomized controlled trials are often employed for their potential to clearly illuminate outcome differences among groups that are attributable to treatment effects. Interventions are formulated to uncover the “active causal component” or in lay terms, what works (Bolton, 2009, p. 161). These trials work well in highly controlled settings such as in a medical environment where intervention protocols and procedures, like random assignment, can be carried out. RCTs are best implemented in structured studies designed to verify outcomes. RCTs function to generalize these discovered outcomes to various selected populations. These interventions often lack the contextual factors, which add dimension and richness (Goldberg, 2006; Muncey, 2009). Personal experience (patient or medical personnel) and idiosyncrasy is where the RCT “methodology loses traction” (Bolton, 2009, p. 163; Devisch & Murray, 2009). There are many reasons qualitative data are added during the mixed methods intervention trial: substantiating the quantitative data, providing increased understanding of the lived experience of the participants through the trial, identifying constructs that may directly or indirectly influence the outcome, understanding unplanned occurrences, and exploring how

contextual factors interact with the treatment (Creswell, Fetters, Plano Clark, & Morales, 2009; Sandelowski, 1996; Song, Sandelowski, & Happ, 2010; Spillane, Stiziel Pareja, Dorner, Barnes, May, Huff, & Camburn, 2010). Conceptualizing and integrating diverse methods into a program of inquiry is increasingly utilized with RCT frameworks (Song, Sandelowski, & Happ, 2010).

Hearts on track study. The study that provided the context for research on the methodological issue of interview fidelity was an RCT from the nursing field. This trial examined exercise adherence among heart failure patients over an 18-month period. The intervention included access to an exercise facility, group sessions for the behavioral strategies for exercise, and an exercise coach for individualized attention and additional exercise approaches. Standard care participants received facility access only.

The qualitative strand explored the perceptions and experiences of participants and study personnel in an effort to contextualize the exercise adherence experience. Specifically, this qualitative purpose is outlined in the grant proposal: Aim 5) We will interview the study participants, individual coaches, and group session leaders during the adoption, transition, and maintenance phases of the Hearts on Track intervention. These interviews served to contextualize the experiences of those who were participating in the trial. On occasion, in health research trials, naturalistic research is added to an intervention to individualize the health or illness experience and provide compelling patient perspectives that can impact how the results are conveyed and policy implemented (Melia, 2013; Tatano Beck, 1993). Intervention group participants were longitudinally interviewed at four time points during their participation: 3 months, 6

months, 12 months, and 18 months. Coaches and group session leaders were also interviewed at these time intervals (Pozehl et al., 2014).

Since this RCT study included a strong qualitative aim, it was a better conceptual fit for a mixed methods RCT study. However, this was not how this project was originally presented to the funders; but it was informally recognized by the nursing researchers as a mixed methods study during the research process. For the purposes of this dissertation project, it made the soundest conceptual sense to view this project as a mixed methods RCT project. The primary project resembled a parallel mixed design where the strands were relatively independent and they addressed related parts of the research question (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2009). The interviews serve to enhance and provide detailed contextual information on the experience of adherence. These data may be complementary or divergent with the results of the intervention, but the overall purpose of mixing was complementarity (Greene, 2007). The challenges in aspiring to interview fidelity were directly related to the specific issues from this study.

Treatment fidelity framework. Treatment fidelity is connected to validity and is a part of experimental, objectivist research. “Treatment fidelity refers to the methodological strategies used to monitor and enhance the reliability and validity of behavioral interventions” (Bellg, et al., 2004, p. 443). Treatment fidelity is vital to RCTs in nursing research (Bruckenthal & Broderick, 2007). Fostering treatment fidelity increases both internal and external validity (Bellg, et al., 2004; Borrelli, et al., 2005; Dyas, Togher, & Siriwardena, 2014; Moncher & Prinz, 1991). Thus, treatment fidelity allows for accurate answers to the research questions regarding the effectiveness of the

intervention directly on the outcome, creates precision in replication, increases power and effect size through minimizing statistical variability, and furthers generalization.

Treatment fidelity has been conceptualized by researchers in a number of ways from general frameworks to individualized instruments and specific strategies. Beginning at the macro-level, Bellg and colleagues (2004) at the National Institutes of Health Behavior Change Consortium (BCC) Treatment Fidelity Working Group developed five components for ensuring treatment fidelity: design, provider training, delivery of treatment, receipt of treatment, and enactment of treatment skills. These make a suitable framework for thinking about and conceptualizing another form of fidelity, interview fidelity. Many in the nursing field have utilized and built on this work, offering strategies and lessons learned from implementation, exploring meaning in variations in fidelity data, and overcoming technological challenges (Bozak, Pozehl, & Yates, 2012; Carpenter, et al. 2013; Resnick, et al., 2005a; Resnick, et al., 2005b; Resnick, et al., 2009, Yates, et al., 2013). Similar to this model and developed from the literature, Gearing, El-Bassel, Ghesquiere, Baldwin, Gillies, & Ngeow (2011) composed their four category (five sub-category) comprehensive intervention fidelity guide (CIFG) checklist. Much earlier, Moncher and Prinz (1991) offered considerations such as supervision of treatment agents training and treatment manuals. Others have customized treatment fidelity to their projects. Black, Wenger, and O'Fallon (2015) used a grounded approach to ensure that key behavioral components of the intervention were a part of their fidelity instrument. Song, Happ, and Sandelowski (2010) based their intervention fidelity model on elements of the intervention, literature, and theory.

Treatment fidelity should be dutifully considered and applied throughout all phases of the research process from the planning through the completion of the study to prevent problems from arising: poorly crafted/irreplicable research design, attrition of research personnel/participants, differential training of personnel, unequal implementation of the intervention (Bellg, et al., 2004; Gearing et al., 2011). Given the vital nature of intervention fidelity, its breach is quite a serious matter. Dyas et al. (2014) in a pilot study, found instances in which fidelity was violated. This breach was not isolated but spread into other areas of the intervention and served to sabotage the intervention. One particular aspect of the research that may be overlooked but is fundamental is the overall theoretical underpinning of the study. “The needs of each study are different and ideally the components of the treatment fidelity plan are selected on the basis of the theoretical and clinical framework for each intervention” (Bellg, et al., 2004, p. 450-451). The concept of fidelity, along with theory and research epistemologies, will help give form to the development of valid interpretive interviews within a mixed methods study.

Interview fidelity framework. In an interpretive research context, the researcher is often viewed as the instrument (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). With any instrument, there can be variety in how it is designed, implemented, and experienced. So, how does one guarantee the skillful implementation of interpretive interviews in a longitudinal, mixed methods RCT? What considerations are there when designing interviews? Are there special strategies with multiple interviewers across several sites? How could interrater reliability be established? What issues arise during the course of interviewing

longitudinally as a part of an RCT that require attention? These are issues to consider when conducting interviews as a part of a mixed methods clinical trial.

The process of arriving at interview fidelity ideals is proposed as a possible solution to this array of challenges. The researcher will iteratively process data from the broader study, personal experiences, and ideas from the expansive literature on treatment fidelity and validity to arrive at interview fidelity ideals within the particular context of the research setting. The researcher used a variety of devices as scaffolds for this process (see Appendix A).

The term, “interview fidelity” does exist in the literature. However, the meaning of interview fidelity was heretofore limited to highly structured interview contexts where interview questions were read verbatim (Butterfield, Borgen, Amundson, & Maglio, 2005; Butterfield, Borgen, Admundson, & Erlebach, 2010; Kissi, Dainty, & Liu, 2012; Nascimento, Majumdar, & Jarvis, 2012). What is being advocated here is an expanded and more nuanced view of interview fidelity as quality so that it can be applied to additional interview formats, such as interpretive interviews. As such, it can be viewed as the devising of a new use for the term.

Interviews

Interviewing as a form of data collection can provide valid data in a range of forms. Researchers add richness to their approach when they employ interviews as a method, a methodology, or as a method in the service of another methodology such as survey or case study (Platt, 2012; Trainor 2013). Defined in these ways, interviews can take several perspectives based on differing ontology. Schwandt (2001) dichotomizes two viewpoints. The first behavioral model is one of direct and unfettered access to reality by

asking solid, well-prepared, postpositivist questions. The participant responds by pouring out the answers in what is often referred to simply as a stimulus response reaction. The second model involves the co-construction of knowledge to better elucidate participants' perspectives rather than yielding more narrowly focused responses to the interviewer's predetermined questions.

It is within the spirit of the latter definition that this dissertation research is based. Simply, an interview can be thought of as an “inter view, an inter change of views” (Kvale, 1996, p. 2). Interpretive interviews were selected to contribute to the context of the RCT by drawing on the participants' sense of the importance of the individual and his or her recounted and reflected upon experience with long-term exercise with chronic heart failure. Thus, the research team had an epistemological vision that data are generated through the interactional nature of interviews (Mason, 1996).

History of interviews. No matter its use, function, definition, the interview has undergone change throughout its existence over time and across disciplinary frameworks. There have been many different researchers with a myriad of ontological and epistemological viewpoints contributing to the scholarship and enriching the dialogue surrounding interviews. Variability in praxis remains within and across fields; each handling interviews with slightly different tools and techniques.

Platt (2012) acknowledges the difficulty in pinning down such an expansive and elusive construct as the interview but attempts to give an overarching historical review, revealing that interviews did not develop in a systematic, linear path. Some of the earliest interview research did not refer to the term interview but spoke of a divergence from the questionnaire. During the Depression era and onward, interviews were used to build oral

histories by obtaining the personal accounts of the suffering of the downtrodden and disenfranchised (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Later work was derivative of marketing and political research and the modern survey with its fields of closed and open responses and perpetual quest for reliability and validity. Next, naturalistic and postmodern perspectives allowed flexibility in structure, saw the participant as a collaborator and viewed the interviewer as the research tool. As interviews remain a heavily utilized research method, challenges continue to be put forward to the interview. Technical challenges, such as question wording, are seen as easily solved and controlled whereas epistemological complexities (like the sociohistorical context of the interview) influencing what we consider knowledge prove much more difficult to decipher (Gubrium et al., 2012). Gubrium and Holstein (2002) offer yet another historical view. Their focus on the roles of the participant in the interview process illustrate a shift from a “passive vessels of answers” to active co-constructor of data (p. 13). (Emphasis in original text.).

Typology. A common classification strategy for interviews is structural. Merriam and Tisdale (2016) offer categories: highly structured or standardized, semistructured, unstructured or informal. The sub-study that serves as the context for this dissertation resides in the middle. It has a strong semi-standardization framework structure, but also some room for adjustment of the questions by the interviewers (Berg, 2008).

Interpretive interviews. Numerous terms exist in the literature to describe the nature of these interviews: generic qualitative interview, open-ended interview, intensive interview, in-depth interview, semi-structured, active interview, dramaturgical interview, reflective, and ethnographic interview (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997; Berg, 2008; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Johnson & Rowlands, 2012; King & Horrocks, 2010;

Merriam, 2009; Roulston, 2010; Seidman, 2006; Spradley, 1979; Warren, 2002).

Commonalities among and features of these include flexibility, open and exploratory form, depth and disclosure of information, experienced-based, contextual, emotive, inductive, relational and interpersonal, and familiarity and closeness (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012; King & Horrocks 2010). The inherent advantage in these interviews is in the intimacy and depth they offer, “the opportunity for an authentic gaze into the soul of another” (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997, p. 305). Seidman (2006) discussed the purpose of in-depth interviews as ascertaining understanding lived experience of others and gaining context for behavior as a pathway to grasp meaning. The relational aspect is also emphasized as rapport is deemed vital to co-construction of knowledge. Rapport is a delicate feature in a research relationship, in which just the right amount must be cultivated for optimum effectiveness. Too much rapport can lead to blurred lines and too little prevents disclosure. Mutual trust and comfort allows for the free creation and exchange of information (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Borer and Fontana (2012) extend thinking on the interpersonal context of interviews in their review of postmodern-informed interviewing. With such a lens, there is less distinction between interviewer and interviewee roles, collaborative relationships among researchers and participants, awareness of power and privilege, voice and polyphony, variety and creativity in presentation formats including poetry and drama, embracing of technology for research purposes, and a returned focus on the senses.

Health sciences. Interpretive interviews have a rich history and a prominent place in the helping and health sciences (Low, 2007; Miczo, 2003; Padgett, 2012). As a research tool within the health care field, the in-depth interview is extensively used

(DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree & 2006). The provider/patient and interviewer/relationship roles are explored with awareness of challenges along with some guidelines and strategies for future researcher practitioners (Mishler, 1984; Nelson, Onwuegbuzie, Wines, & Frels, 2013; Munhall, 2012a; Zoppi & Epstein 2002).

Mixed methods. Interviews of all types are utilized in mixed methods studies (Brannan & Halcomb, 2009; Morse, 2012). Interviews are the most common form of qualitative data in mixed methods studies in the health sciences (O’Cathain, Murphy, & Nicholl, 2007). In-depth interviews for the creation of text-based data are a central component of mixed methods inquiry (Johnson & Turner, 2003; Padgett, 2012).

Longitudinal. As is the case in more traditional forms of quantitative research, qualitative longitudinal research also examines change over time. In fact, qualitative research often concerns itself specifically with the study of a process rather than focusing on more static information reflecting a single point in time. If within the resources and scope of the project, it is advantageous to pursue such data as this accumulation of information provides strength over “one-shot” interviews (Warren, 2002, p. 98). An additional benefit of multiple interviews over time is that a trusting relationship and sense of rapport can develop, enabling a space where interviewer and interviewee can collaborate (Padgett, 2012). In such a milieu, participants can freely share descriptive and contextual information as well as feel safe in revealing their emotions and personal stories (Grinyer & Thomas, 2012).

Question formation. Many authors proffer their ideas for the features of the ideal question. The perfect question should be open-ended, clear, accessible (in terms of language), neutral (not leading), humble, research-focused, meaningful, relevant (to