

Eight Issues to Think About Before Interviewing Farmers

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rapport; insider;
outsider;
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Abstract: This article is based on my personal experience and understanding of conducting research interviews with farmers. It incorporates ethnographic fiction—an approach to writing that is based on first-hand accounts—to examine some of the issues that researchers might think about before interviewing farmers. Research interviews with farmers are unique events because farmers are a sub-cultural group located in a particular landscape, which means that they have quite different experiences, behaviors, and motivations to academic researchers. It is hard to build an understanding of conducting research interviews with farmers other than by doing them. The article focuses on what, for me, were the eight most important issues around interviewing farmers that I had to grapple with. Discussing these issues may add to potential interviewers' understanding of some of the issues with farmer interviews and result in improved interaction and co-operation with them.

Table of Contents

- [1. The Narrative](#)
- [2. What We Already Know About Interviewing Farmers](#)
- [3. The Eight Key Issues I Encountered](#)
 - [3.1 Fitting in as a good guest](#)
 - [3.2 Farmers decide who are "insiders" or "outsiders"](#)
 - [3.3 Role of rapport](#)
 - [3.4 Reflection as part of interviewing](#)
 - [3.5 Research interviewing is more than a conversation](#)
 - [3.6 A chance for farmers to construct their own identity](#)
 - [3.7 The unequal sharing of benefits from the interview](#)
 - [3.8 The doorknob syndrome](#)
- [4. Final Words](#)
- [Acknowledgment](#)
- [References](#)
- [Author](#)
- [Citation](#)

1. The Narrative¹

The clouds part and the afternoon sun fills the spaces between the trees lining the gravel road. I glance into the rear-view mirror at the swirling clouds of dust behind me. Slowing at the farmer's driveway, I know that the gently drifting dust means it's a little too dry for them to continue planting their crops. I am conducting interviews with farmers who are in the midst of planting—one of the busiest times on their farming calendars. I feel better knowing that I won't be interfering with their work. I don't like making demands on farmers at this time of the year, but the interviews need to be done, the project is behind schedule, and milestones need to be reached. [1]

I drive past a row of metal silos, a grain auger, and a truck ready for loading, and then an idle tractor and the planter in a confusing folded mess of awkward angles, rubber, and metal shapes. The machine has been working: it is dusty, but in places there is the dull sheen of metal polished smooth from many hours of soil contact. [2]

My mind wanders to the people I'm about to meet. I know their names but little else, and they know little about me. I feel that the farmers will all think that I am very different from them; I'm an academic, a researcher, and—worse still—I'm from the city. *I feel sure that they will think that I don't care, that I don't understand their lives and their world. But the thing is that I know their world very well; I was once a member of the farming culture, sharing similar goals and attachments.* They don't know this, though. I feel a connection with them, but it is only me who feels it, and the connection weakens as the years pass since I was a farmer. [3]

There is no more time for these thoughts. I steer the car through the gateway into the yard of the farmhouse, avoiding farm dogs that spin in wild circles as they bark at my arrival. Parking the car where others have parked before, I take my folder that contains a consent form and a participant information sheet from the front seat and place my digital recorder on top of them, with my glasses case alongside it. I tuck my things under my left arm and walk toward the house. My right hand is free to greet the farmer when we meet. [4]

When we shake hands, I notice the farmer's work-hardened hands. I wonder about the types of work that would make them so calloused and what he must think of my soft hands. *The farmer talks of rain that is expected over the weekend while taking off dusty boots that he leaves by the doormat. I start to take off my shoes, but he says "don't bother," as if it is unlikely that my shoes would ever get dirty enough to be a problem inside the house. I am a guest and do what I am told, following him into the warm kitchen.* [5]

1 This section of the article is a constructed narrative that takes real events and observations and arranges them into a cohesive whole that is fictional to the extent that they did not take place in the order described, with that person, at that place, or at that time.

He asks, "Would you like a coffee or tea?" I respond, "Only if you're having one," but I hope he is. Sharing the experience of a cup of tea or coffee would make this unusual situation, where I have come to interview a stranger, a little bit more normal. I'm happy when the farmer reaches for the electric kettle. "Make yourself comfortable, sit anywhere," he suggests as he fills the pot with water. While the tea is being prepared, I ask whether I can record our conversation. Once the mugs are delivered to the table, I ask the farmer to read the information sheet and sign the interview consent form. He glances at it and mumbles something that sounds like "looks OK" as he quickly signs it. [6]

I explain that I record and transcribe the interview so that I can review what's been said. I mention that I might use some quotes from the interview in any publications that come from the research, but it will be confidential, with the names of people and places and any other identifying material removed. I set the digital recorder in his direction, pressing the start button. [7]

The first questions are about the size of his business, how much land he manages, the area used for cropping, how far he is down the pathway to adopting precision agriculture, and whether he undertakes no-till practices or not and how long he has been like that. [8]

Seemingly, contradicting himself, the farmer says, "We're fully no till, but we will cultivate if we need to when we're cropping a Lucerne paddock²." I state the purpose of the interview again. It seems to help us both to focus on the questions and reminds us of what needs to be covered in the interview. [9]

When a person's name is mentioned, I reiterate that the interview is completely confidential and that anything that is used from them will not be identifiable as having come from him. [10]

Without being too forced or too apparent, I try to build rapport by occasionally using the farmer's name and almost without thinking matching the tone and tempo of his speech, but I'm not sure if I'm succeeding. [11]

The way the farmer confidently articulates his story suggests that he wants me to think that he hasn't made any mistakes, that he is capable and in control. What he tells me indicates that he believes that his success has all been his doing; I wonder if this is truly the case. I don't know how to formulate a question that will elicit deeper meanings. He seems so self-assured and knows what he wants from the interview. I feel that he has control of the conversation and that I just need to let him tell his story in the way that he wants to. [12]

My next question includes a mention of climate change. The farmer responds emphatically—he clearly doesn't believe in it. He wants to know what I think about it. *I change the topic to avoid giving my opinion. Anyway, this is not what I am*

2 Also known as Alfalfa, Lucerne is an important forage crop in many countries around the world.

interviewing him about, and I sense that if the discussion continues in that direction, I'll lose any rapport that I've built up. [13]

This farmer is interested in my research and what I've found from the interviews. I tell him about the aims of the project in more detail and the places that I've visited for the interviews; I don't mention other farmers' names. Talking in generalities, I say that farmers in some areas use precision agriculture and variable rates more than other areas because of their variable soil types. *After reflecting on the interviews of the last week I find that the influences on farmers' decisions have become too complex to explain in a casual conversation.* I don't want to mislead anyone by giving out inaccurate results. He wants simple and immediate answers, but I know only in the qualitative data analysis of the coming weeks will the findings become clear. [14]

I'm tired. It's the third interview of the last day of a busy week, and I've driven hundreds of kilometers through unfamiliar country to meet and interview strangers, without time for a break. I can't remember what the farmer just said; I don't know what I want to talk about next, and I don't know if I've already asked the question that's in my head. To avoid repeating myself, *I ask a different question. The farmer answers it and keeps on talking, but he drifts off topic with a point that he wants to make. I remember the theme that I was exploring and continue. [15]*

After I feel that nothing new is being added to the interview, I start to pick up signs that the farmer is also becoming restless. I start to summarize what the farmer has said during the interview, picking out the parts that are most relevant to comment on in case he has more to add. I start to rearrange my folder, notepad, and pen so they form a neat, ordered pile of objects whose work has been done and are now ready to be packed away. As I do this, I hope the farmer says something more without self-censoring, but his glance at the red operating light of the digital recorder means he is still cautious with what he says. When summarizing any further starts to feel unnatural, I reach for the recorder and turn it off. *The farmer starts talking again, revisiting one of the issues that I have just mentioned. I'd like what he says on the record but it would become too obvious if I switched the machine back on.* He's less controlled, and seems almost relieved that the recorder is off. We talk for several more minutes, but I don't take notes because I think that even that will destroy his candor. [16]

I thank the farmer for his time; he says if there is any further information that I need, I should just give him a call. I feel happy with the interview; we have explored topics that others had not previously raised. The farmer's mood seems lighter as he walks me to the back door; he seems happy to get back to work. He has a truck to fill with grain and a tractor to prepare for work before his day is over. I sense that I have stayed long enough without interrupting his day too much. [17]

2. What We Already Know About Interviewing Farmers

The narrative of the previous section touches on some of the issues I have considered important for interviewing farmers. These are worth looking at because there are many characteristics about the occupation of farming that make it different to most other occupations. VANCLAY (2004) describes farmers as experiencing "a way of life, a way of making a living that acquires a meaning far deeper than almost any other occupational identity" (p.213). This depth of meaning comes about because farmers are so strongly influenced by tradition, which includes a desire to sustain the farm in family hands (GASSON & ERRINGTON, 1993; KUEHNE, 2013, 2014), and also because their work overlaps with family and leisure activities. [18]

To reveal, and explain farmers' deeply held values, attitudes and beliefs, personal interviews have become an important part of the tradition of using qualitative research approaches with farmers (RILEY, 2010). When these interviews are done without taking into account the farmers' approach to dialogue, communication is likely to suffer. The cost from poor quality communication with farmers has been suggested to include effects on the economy, the environment, and food supplies; which can then interfere with the lives of the general public (CARR & WILKINSON, 2005; HIGGINS, 1991). Examining how research interviews are conducted with farmers and discussing some of the potential problems with them should be helpful in reducing negative impacts to farmers and the wider community. [19]

The issues that are addressed in this article are based on reflexive journals that were written while conducting several hundred hours of interviews mostly in Australia, but also in Canada. The article contributes to what is a scant literature about interviewing farmers. It attempts to convey to readers what some of the experience of conducting an interview with a farmer might be like for those who have not previously done so, and it highlights some of the key issues that a person inexperienced with farmer interviews should be aware of. [20]

It can be anxiety provoking for any new researcher entering the field to undertake interviews (SNYDER, 1995) and even more so for researchers entering the strange and unfamiliar world of farmers for the first time (McELWEE, 2010). There is a comprehensive literature addressing general research interviewing which includes some widely used and respected standard texts (see for example: GUBRIUM & HOLSTEIN, 2001; KVALE & BRINKMANN, 2009; WEISS, 1995). While this literature is useful for those seeking to familiarize themselves with conducting interviews it does not usually address issues related to the interview process which are not reported because of an emphasis on the publication of results (YEE & ANDREWS, 2006). And there are varied reasons why interviews can become problematic; such as when people are not very informative or when they have an agenda (JOSSELSOON, 2013). Sometimes the conversational partnership is difficult to negotiate, requiring adaptability and the ability to change direction to explore emerging insights and themes (RUBIN & RUBIN, 2011).

Coping with this uncertainty requires concentration and responsiveness from the interviewer which can make the interview a tiring process (WEISS, 1995). [21]

There is some literature focused on the process of interviewing farmers in a developing country context (OUDWATER & MARTIN, 2003; RHOADES, 1985). Even though some of the requirements for general research interviews in developed countries, such as the generation of empathy and rapport, the act of listening and questioning, and the process of restatement, clarification and persistence (PARTINGTON, 2001) are also the same for farmer interviews (SHARP & KREMER, 2006) there is little literature solely discussing farmer interviews. This dearth of research on the topic of farmer interviewing means that there are not many differing viewpoints on how interviews should be conducted with them. Some examples are; ROGERS and BEAL (1958) who focus on improving validity by building rapport, McELWEE (2010) who describes a methodological approach focusing on reflection and reflexivity, and SHARP and KREMER (2006) who address the possibility of sexual harassment and intimidation during the interviews. There is not much to be gained from the literature using farmer interviews as a method. CALVO-IGLESIAS, CRECENTE-MASEDA and FRA-PALEO (2006) for example, suggested that it was often unclear how they were carried out, and that the literature mainly dealt with issues such as sample selection, interview structure, the questions asked, or the use of others to validate the interviewee's responses. Some of this lack of examination of farmer' interviews could be because it is a social interaction which means that there is no precise way of doing it, because every interview has different people involved and develops differently (NUNKOOSING, 2005). [22]

The preceding section of this article takes the form of ethnographic fiction. While this genre can include accounts based on real events this article is only fictional to the extent that the events that are described did not happen in the order, with the person, and at the time and the place that are described. It is a constructed narrative that is grounded in specific events (DENISON & RINEHART, 2000) and interweaves the "multiple voices and realities" (DAY, 2002, Abstract) from the participants of interviews that I conducted from 2006 to 2016. Ethnographic fiction is an approach favored by researchers seeking to overcome some of the limitations on understanding and communication found with standard forms of scientific writing. This approach has become increasingly methodologically sophisticated as researchers have sought to emphasize reflexivity and a greater consideration of the methods (RILEY, 2010). As a way to judge the quality of ethnographic writing RICHARDSON (2000, p.254) suggests that it should make a substantive contribution to understanding social life, have aesthetic appeal, show reflexive thinking, be affective, and express a reality. When it displays these characteristics ethnographic fiction can evoke emotions, and enable more people to enter and better understand unfamiliar worlds, which the researcher has personally experienced (DENISON & RINEHART, 2000; GRAY, 2004; SPARKES, 2002). Even though this narrative did not happen exactly as it is written it includes real people, actual observed behaviors, real events and real discussions (SPARKES, 2002). [23]

By providing a subjective lived experience of the farmer interview this article seeks to contribute to an understanding of farmer's behavior during the interview process, and supply hints that might help researchers who are new to research interviews with farmers generate better results from their interviews, and reduce the potential for antagonizing them in the process (DAY 2002). This can be necessary because researchers working with farmers can be skilled in some technical area but "lack the social research skills and perspectives that will enable such research" (CAISTER, GREEN & WORTH, 2012, p.23). [24]

One way to gain greater understanding of the world of farmers is to live and work with them. Whether it is volunteer work, such as that involved with conservation projects, or paid seasonal work the necessary conversations and interactions could lead to some level of familiarity with their lives. But working in this way might not be a good investment in time or suitable for many people. [25]

This article might give potential research interviewers a feeling of what it is like to conduct a farmer interview, and greater confidence to do it for themselves. It is also important because it acknowledges that farmers differ to other groups by contextualizing some common interview issues in a way that makes them relevant for those intending to conduct farmer interviews. Farmers are different to other groups because of their complicated relationship with their land, how the environment and their occupation influence their identity and behavior, their focus on families, and the multigenerational character of their family farms (KUEHNE, 2013; RILEY, 2010). [26]

Interviews are an important social research method that are especially suited for those wanting to better understand the actions of farmers because the information that interviews generate come from the perspective of the interviewees (DENZIN, 1989). Unlike other research methods interviews provide an opportunity for farmers to describe their own world and present their opinions in their own words so that they are able to emphasize what they find important (KVALE & BRINKMANN, 2009). The interviewer is able to enter the farmer's world and make that world understandable to others while still being grounded in the "behaviors, language, definitions, attitude and feeling of those studied" (DENZIN, 1989, p.71). [27]

3. The Eight Key Issues I Encountered

In the course of conducting farmer interviews eight key issues were repeatedly encountered. They do not cover every situation that farmer interviewers might find themselves in; but they are important to think about and prepare for. [28]

3.1 Fitting in as a good guest

"The farmer talks of rain that is expected over the weekend while taking off dusty boots that he leaves by the doormat. I start to take off my shoes, but he says 'don't bother'."³

I have taken the stance that as an interviewer, I am being invited into the farmer's house, and even though it is multi-functional and part of a business enterprise (DI DOMENICO & LYNCH, 2007) I still need to behave as the rules of etiquette would suggest that a guest should behave (DENZIN, 1989). But this is not always easy because the need to gather research data and the need to fit in with the social situation are sometimes in conflict, or the cultural expectations can be unclear (YEE & ANDREWS, 2006). This means, for example, that even though they may be disruptive I should accept distractions, such as crying children, daytime television or noisy pets that could interfere with the interviews. If I do not behave in a way that my host expects they could be put offside and the interview results will suffer more than the initial convenience. GLESNE and PESHKIN (1992) concisely summarize the importance of adjusting one's behavior, suggesting that

"although the range of accommodations you make to be inoffensive in your research role do not ensure rapport, they do enhance the prospects of its establishment. You constantly monitor your behavior so that people who are unaccustomed to the presence of researchers in their lives will be at ease in your presence. Your challenge is to fit in" (p.95). [29]

Some of the challenge is also to become aware of the acceptable codes of behavior—the communicated and non-communicated house rules—and to avoid violating them (DI DOMENICO & LYNCH, 2007). Being invited into a person's house as a social researcher is more than a simple invitation into their house, because when combined with an interview it becomes an opportunity to understand the interviewee's world. [30]

3 This quote has been extracted from Section 1 (similarly for Sections 3.2 to 3.8), and illustrates the key issue discussed in the corresponding section.

3.2 Farmers decide who are "insiders" or "outsiders"

"I feel sure that they will think that I don't care, that I don't understand their lives and their world. But the thing is that I know their world very well; I was once a member of the farming culture, sharing similar goals and attachments."

When conducting interviews with Canadian farmers, I felt that in terms of group membership I was treated as an "outsider." Unlike interviews with Australian farmers I received no acknowledgment of a shared cultural understanding that would have allowed me at least to claim the "space between" the "insider" and "outsider" groups (MOORE, 2015, p.87). Initially this was puzzling because I was able to engage with interviewees using the language of an "insider," especially when talking about the practicalities of the operation of a farm. But even though I could display that level of familiarity, interviewees did not acknowledge that I had the experience or the understanding of an "insider." I think that much of the reason for this may have been that I was from another country. My practical knowledge of agriculture, my understanding of farming practices, and my familiarity with the names of farm machines and their purposes was not enough to give me insider "status."⁴ [31]

In an interview situation there should be advantages to being an "insider" in that 1. it would lead to a deeper and clearer understanding of the culture (p.88), 2. social interaction should occur more effortlessly, and 3. interviewees might be more likely to tell the truth, while 4. researchers might be better able to judge the truth (BONNER & TOLHURST, 2002, pp.8-9). The most important advantage offered by the "insider" perspective could be the understanding of the culture which helps in knowing which questions to ask to get answers to the research question, and knowing how to ask them so that they are understood by a farmer. [32]

It is possible that the main reason that I was not considered an "insider," when conducting interviews with Canadian farmers, is that farmers are more inclined to trust people who are local than those who are distant. This bias towards localness with farmers is similar to that of the people who have been shown to be more likely to invest in firms that are geographically close to them, that communicate in their native tongue, and that have management from the same cultural background (GRINBLATT & KELOHARJU, 2001). From my perspective the language of farming is to some extent common to all groups of farmers, but farmers from outside of the cultural group that I belonged to would still easily notice my unfamiliarity with the nuances of the language of their group and would therefore classify me as an outsider (VANCLAY & ENTICOTT, 2011). [33]

It seems that farmers categorize people as "insiders" or "outsiders" by how similar their language, culture and geographical location are to their own, as well as how similar their group affiliation is to their own. Performing poorly on any of these characteristics could count against a person being judged an "insider;" when I lost points for my lack of localness, my identification with, and

⁴ I also think that the idea that I was once a farmer and then changed careers to become a researcher may have been incomprehensible for many.

understanding of the farming culture (my insider knowledge) still was not enough to achieve "insider" status. [34]

Some suggest that the terms "insider" and "outsider" should be abandoned (RYAN, 2015) and that the idea of assumed commonality interferes with the researcher's openness to possibilities arising from the encounter with research participants (NOWICKA & RYAN, 2015). It might be best to cast notions of commonality aside and approach what the farmer says by thinking about why they have answered in the way that they have. Researchers might try to place themselves in the farmer's position and imagine what they would say if they were faced with the same complex, competing demands that the farmer experiences. [35]

3.3 Role of rapport

"I change the topic to avoid giving my opinion. Anyway, this is not what I am interviewing him about, and I sense that if the discussion continues in that direction, I'll lose any rapport that I've built up."

When commonality between the researcher and participant does not exist, rapport becomes more important (NOWICKA & RYAN, 2015) because it reduces the distance between interviewer and interviewee, reduces interviewee anxiety, and builds trust to make them more comfortable in sharing information (GLESNE & PESHKIN, 1992). [36]

I have not always been successful in developing rapport. For example, I now realize that my earliest research interviews were sometimes unfocused and potentially frustrating for some farmers expecting a more directed conversation. Admitting to this failure to provide direction is important because much of the role of the interviewer is to focus on, and guide the interviewee towards discussing the themes which are the most important to the interviewer, while also examining ambiguous and contradictory statements, and determining whether they are representative of the life-world of the interviewee or not (KVALE & BRINKMANN, 2009). To put the farmer more at ease about what was expected from them in subsequent interviews I provided them with more guidance in the form of printed information of various types. Using visual guides have appeared to focus the attention of interviewees much more on the research questions, so much so that some actively used them as a checklists making sure that all the listed topics were systematically addressed. [37]

Rapport is not just built by making the process clear to the interviewee; it is also built by showing genuine interest in what the interviewee has to say. Making the interview process clear to the interviewer is one way to build rapport but the other ways are not so clear because there is limited research addressing the relationship between the researcher and the researched; the efforts that are required to build rapport, and the benefits to be gained from doing this. The definitions of rapport are vague and confusing; and there is no agreed way of initiating rapport (GLESNE & PESHKIN, 1992). SPRADLEY (1979, p.46) provides a useful definition of rapport suggesting that it is about "asking questions,

listening instead of talking, taking a passive rather than an assertive role, expressing verbal interest in the other person, and showing interest by eye contact and other nonverbal means." It is also about ensuring a safe and comfortable environment to share information, and demonstrating trust and respect for the interviewee and the information that they provide (DICICCO-BLOOM & CRABTREE, 2006). Ideally rapport should lead to interviewees sharing more personal and more useful information; and providing a more complete, honest, and sincere disclosure (DUNDON & RYAN, 2010; JORGENSON, 1992). [38]

The benefits of encouraging rapport seem clear, but in some circumstances rapport with farmers can be difficult to establish. This is especially so with farmers who are responding to environmental reforms such as reductions in water entitlements, or those experiencing societal pressure such as the expectation to reduce chemical usage, and seems especially difficult to encourage when the interviewer could be perceived as being aligned with the causes of the farmer's problems such as governments and their departments and institutions. [39]

Another challenge to the development of rapport is that in the interview situation rapport needs to be developed quickly (DICICCO-BLOOM & CRABTREE, 2006), although some suggest that rapport is related to the interviewer's strategy and style and not the time available (ROSENZWELG, 1993). The difficulty with the expectation of rapid rapport is that this is not how farmers usually work. Mostly their gradual development of relationships is built on developing levels of trust, and the sharing of similar values, beliefs and knowledge. [40]

The partners in rapport socially produce it in stages that usually include; apprehension, exploration, co-operation and participation (DICICCO-BLOOM & CRABTREE, 2006). It is present when there is intense mutual interest in what the other person is saying, resulting in feelings of friendliness, caring, and being in harmony (TICKLE-DEGNEN & ROSENTHAL, 1990). It does not happen just through the actions of the researcher, but it is due to the joint construction of reality that the researcher and interviewer mutually interpret and create in an improvised fashion to facilitate clear communication (JORGENSON, 1992). [41]

HENDRICK (1990) talks about rapport between two people that can seemingly have all of the required ingredients, but how it is only at times when everything comes together perfectly to provide "magic moments" of rapport. Although it may be unrealistic to expect such high levels of rapport with farmers to be built in such a short time, an awareness of what hinders or helps rapport will lead to at least some useful level of rapport. [42]

3.4 Reflection as part of interviewing

"After reflecting on the interviews of the last week I find that the influences on farmers' decisions have become too complex to explain in a casual conversation."

The conclusion of the face-to-face component of the interviews is only the completion of the data gathering and ideally needs to be followed by a period of critical reflection. This is because the research results are derived from more than just the analysis of the interview transcripts, but also include the reflection that happens after (and even during) the interview. The post-interview review and reflection is useful, because it is at this time that the memories of the key points of the interview are at their strongest. Critical reflection is, however, much more than just thinking about what happened, it is a structured process of looking at the topic from different perspectives. It has been conceptualized in BROOKFIELD (1988) as a process involving four stages that are used in varying degrees:

- assumption analysis, which is about developing a self-awareness of the assumptions underlying beliefs, values, behaviors, and social structures and then assessing them against lived experience;
- contextual awareness, which is a realization that the above assumptions exist in a historical and cultural context;
- imaginative speculation, which involves seeking out different ways of thinking about the subject of reflection to challenge existing knowledge;
- reflective skepticism, which is a process of questioning claims of truth using the combination of: assumption analysis; contextual awareness, and imaginative speculation. [43]

Reflection has also been classified by ZEICHNER and LISTON (1996) according to the effort, speed, and rigor involved, and the time when it occurs. The first level "rapid reflection" is simultaneous with the event, is immediate and automatic. This might be the interviewer's question to themselves at the time of the interview. In my case I want to know, "has this question been answered well enough that I can move on to the next topic?" The second level of reflection—repair—also occurs while the event is happening but requires more thought. In an interview situation I could be thinking to myself, "other interviewees have said something different to what the interviewee has just said, I should ask them more about that." The third level of reflection—review—is informal and takes place soon after the event. For me this type of reflection involves recording my thoughts and impressions about recently completed interviews in a journal. The fourth level of reflection—research—extends the previous level by being more systematic and takes place in the weeks or months after the event. In my case this was the drafting of a paper from the research journals. The fifth level of reflection—retheorizing and research—is more academic in that it also involves the literature and can take place over months or years. This finished article is an example of the last level of reflection where I have retheorized the research months or even years after the research. [44]

The post interview time of review also acts to close off the interview so that it becomes more strongly differentiated in the mind of the interviewer from those before and after it. It reduces the effects of recency where the last interview is the one that is most strongly remembered. Carrying out sequential interviews, without an opportunity for reflection means that the salient points from each interview can become conflated until differences between each interviewee begin to disappear (MURDOCK, 1962). [45]

Reflection is not just about remembering what has been said; instead it is thinking that is integral to the interview analysis. It is the process whereby initial ideas are formed, surprises are uncovered and new insights are first thought about and recorded. Reflection is part of the sense-making process where that which has just happened is compared to that which is already known. It adds an extra layer of information to the interview results which are then able to be further investigated in following interviews. [46]

3.5 Research interviewing is more than a conversation

"... I ask a different question. The farmer answers it and keeps on talking, but he drifts off topic with a point that he wants to make. I remember the theme that I was exploring and ask another question."

Most people are good at negotiating the complexity of holding conversations with another person with the aim of learning from them by being engaged around an issue of common interest. They are good at working towards developing joint understandings of what is being talked about (GARROD & PICKERING, 2004). They know when and how to insert parts of their own lives into the conversation by putting forward their own ideas, opinions and observations. A research interview, although it has elements of a regular conversation, is not like this because it is; more formal, purposeful, and directed (SPRADLEY, 1979). It can be thought of as a "serious conversation with a purpose" (BINGHAM & MOORE, 1959, p.37). [47]

Unlike conversations between friends, interviews have a marked contrast between who talks and who listens, who gives out information, who asks the questions and who raises the topics and determines when they have been discussed sufficiently (ZOPPI, 1997). [48]

When the interviewer-interviewee relationship approaches being a friendship it brings about the potential problem of subjects over identifying with researchers and shaping the information that they provide to that which they think the researcher wants to know (DEXTER, 2006; DUNDON & RYAN, 2010; GLESNE & PESHKIN, 1992). A similar outcome can occur if the interviewer reacts to the interviewee in such a way that the interviewee perceives the interviewer's desired response. Interviewer bias is also likely to become evident as a result of their different interests towards the themes that are being explored (KVALE & BRINKMANN, 2009). Interviewer bias is only problematic if it is not

acknowledged; but if it is acknowledged it can become a tool for deeper probing and understanding. [49]

3.6 A chance for farmers to construct their own identity

"The way the farmer confidently articulates his story suggests that he wants me to think that he hasn't made any mistakes, that he is capable and in control."

In some interviews I have felt that the story I have been told is incomplete. It appeared as though the farmers were acting out a part and selectively presenting information as part of that process. It has long been accepted that our sense of self is created through interactions with others (HUME, 2012 [1739]; MEAD, 1913), but research interviewers have not always understood that, regardless of whether they wish it or not they are involved in a social interaction (DEXTER, 2006) that shapes the information they gather. [50]

Just to enter into the farmer's world means that the researcher will be presenting an identity that allows a relationship to be built (GERSON & HOROWITZ, 2002). Importantly for the interviews, some, but not all farmers regulate their behavior so that they create their own portrait of themselves enhancing their identity as "good" farmers, "capable" farmers, "leading" farmers or some other construct that incorporates the qualities and characteristics that are important to them (BERINSKY, 2004). This means that during their interviews they are unlikely to provide information that is in conflict with their chosen identities (BURKE & STETS, 2009). This does not mean everything that they say is unreliable or misleading, but it does mean that what they see as important to the bolstering of their identity may not be discussed in an accurate way. For example if a farmer adopts an identity as a consistently good decision-maker, they are also less likely to admit to making any wrong decisions during the interviews. The effect of the farmer's attempts at maintaining their identity is that it can be difficult to know what is really being conveyed in some interviews. The interviewer can manage this problem by being aware that it can exist, and by asking themselves whether what they are hearing is plausible and if it is not why it is not. [51]

In a similar way to how issues about maintaining identity can influence the results from the interviews, interviewees may also mislead by attempting to present a "credible and knowledgeable self to the interviewer. In the course of responding to the questions put to them, the respondents "present a self" which means that they may selectively distort, mask or lie about their attitudes on any given question" (DENZIN, 1989, p.108). Responding to interview questions in this way highlights the phenomenon of the "artful and constructed character of lives and experiences" (ATKINSON & SILVERMAN, 1997, p.312). Some interviewees are likely to rehearse the presentation of "themselves" for the interviews, so much so that even when they appear to be providing great insight and self-revelation it can be as a result of them having previously rehearsed and constructed a "self" (ATKINSON & SILVERMAN, 1997; GOFFMAN, 1959). [52]

The key point is that when farmers participate in the interviews they do not agree to participate in any particular way (NUNKOOSING, 2005); but are doing it on their own unarticulated terms and for their own reasons, which may include constructing a "self." [53]

3.7 The unequal sharing of benefits from the interview

"I thank the farmer for his time, he says if there is any further information that I need, I should just give him a call."

I have encouraged farmers to be involved in research interviews by suggesting that they will be contributing information that will be useful for future policy design, or that it will contribute to change that will have a long-term impact by helping industry organizations, government departments and others better interact with farmers in general. I tell them this to encourage their involvement; and it might have these outcomes, but it seems to be a very uncertain path from conducting these interviews to having the information used in this way. Promises like these could be what MILES and HUBERMAN (1994) were concerned about when they suggested that: "It is probably true that, fundamentally, field research is an act of betrayal, no matter how well intentioned or well integrated the researcher" (p.233). But they may be identifying a problem where none exists. It may simply be that the interviewee provides "a gift of time, of text, and of understanding" (LIMERICK, BURGESS-LIMERICK & GRACE, 1996, p.458) to the researcher with the expectation that, even though the act of interviewing is invasive, they will not "betray them, abuse their power, or misuse their words" (ibid.). [54]

When conducting interviews with farmers I am conscious that I am taking up their time, which they need to ration out carefully at busy times of the year. I know that they could be doing other things that would be more immediately beneficial to them. The inequality in this relationship is that I am paid for my time to seek out information that I do not know, from farmers who are volunteering their time; which makes it appear as a very unequal transaction (DENZIN, 1989). The benefits do not all flow one-way however. The farmer might perceive that they gain from the interviews because they can:

- feel validated as a person through having an opportunity to convey their expert knowledge;
- take a break to their work to talk to someone else (farming is an occupation that can be tedious and isolated);
- achieve added understanding of something that is important to them including enhanced self-awareness;
- develop an enhanced sense of purpose and enjoy the prestige and the attention from being involved in the interviews and being associated with a particular research organization;

- influence policies or programs;
- become empowered by gaining a voice in the literature and the community (HUTCHINSON, WILSON & WILSON, 1994; LIMERICK et al., 1996). [55]

Interviewees can also find the experience rewarding because they are unlikely to often have the experience of another person spending an hour or so with them, and only being interested in them and seeking to understand their experiences of a particular topic (BORNSTEIN, MARCUS & CASSIDY, 2000). What initially appears as an unequal transaction—where the interviewer appears to make all the demands and receive all the benefits—may also provide some benefit to the interviewee. [56]

3.8 The doorknob syndrome

"The farmer starts talking again, revisiting one of the issues that I have just mentioned. I'd like what he says on the record but it would become too obvious if I switched the machine back on."

Often the interviewee relaxes once they know that the interview is over. It seems that some farmers are constrained in their discussions, not only by the idea that they are being recorded but also by the idea that they are participating in an interview. Although some do not care at all, when others see the digital recorder being switched off (the signal that the researcher's professional responsibilities are over (GERSON & HOROWITZ, 2002) they relax and talk more freely with greater levels of reflection and potentially with greater levels of honesty; they perceive that the interview has been completed, and once they are "off the record" they begin to relate on a much more relaxed, open and personal level. [57]

One way to view this phenomenon is as the "doorknob syndrome;" the scenario where comments of significance are made toward the end of an interview, and often when there is too little time remaining to address them (SHULMAN, 2012; ZOPPI, 1997). One way to explain this (as already mentioned) is that interviewees are conscious of controlling or constructing the reality that they are creating over the course of the interview so once they perceive the interview as completed, and their performance is over, they are able to relax (ATKINSON & SILVERMAN, 1997). Whatever the cause, I keep the digital recorder operating for as long as possible "... in anticipation that although the interview is finished, our informant may not be" (WOLCOTT, 2005, p.107). [58]

It could also be that farmers see the interviews as an event with a distinct start and finish, whereas social researchers are more likely to see the face-to-face interactions of the interviews as one part of a sense-making process that begins with the planning and thinking that happens before the interviews and finishes with the analysis and reporting after the interviews are completed. [59]

The problem described by this phenomenon is that useful information can be withheld until the interview is being wound up, thereby reducing the researcher's

ability to explore topics. This last minute willingness to introduce new information may also be assisted by the successful building of rapport, which is likely to be at its highest at the end of the interview. It seems clear that this phenomenon is related to the signals that the interview is completed or finishing, and the interviewee's awareness that the interview is over. It is not clear why they often wish to continue talking, but it could be that in their mind the artificial environment of the interview is replaced by the chance of having a "normal" conversation. [60]

4. Final Words

The headlights frame kangaroos that stretch tall and then bow low to eat the last of the grass from the roadside. I think about my day and how I am passing on my own unwelcome series of demands from research that has its calendar of funding arrangements, milestones and approvals that need to be satisfied, with little concern for the effect on others. My challenge becomes carrying out the interviews as well as I can while making my requests of the farmer as least burdensome as possible. What I have learnt from interviewing farmers that could be useful for others, is to:

- Make an effort to fit in, and behave in a way that you think the farmer expects.
- Don't worry about not being an "insider;" even if you think it is possible, the farmer probably won't think of you as one.
- Encourage basic levels of rapport by guiding farmers to know what is expected from them, and showing them that you are interested in them.
- Understand that critical reflection during and after the interview is an important part of the process that is sometimes ignored.
- Think of the interview as a purposeful conversation.
- Recognize that the farmer may see the interview as an opportunity to create or bolster their identity.
- Be aware that benefits from the interview flow to the researcher more so than the farmer.
- Remember that interviews with farmers often have uncertain finishes. [61]

The last of the sunset disappears and the night becomes darker. The few lights that I see mark the ends of the occasional driveway. Cattle grids, property signs, and hopeful letterboxes fly past as I retrace my earlier journey. Farmers know a different land and a different life to many, they belong to different groups that talk about different things, and find different things important. Their lives and experiences are unique, but they may not realize it, and they may not be able to express the differences in ways that others can understand. But in the right circumstances and the right encouragement they will give outsiders the privilege of learning something about their world. [62]

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