IDEA ORIENTATION AND INGRATIATION IN THE INTERVIEW: A DYNAMIC MODEL OF RESPONSE BIAS*

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The question of the validity of survey interviews continues to occupy an important place in social research methodology. Although a great proportion of data in social science derives from interviews, and inferences from these data are the bases of many accepted facts and theories, the legitimacy of the technique itself is still being questioned. Even if we leave out of account naive acceptance and blanket attacks, we still find contrasting models of what happens in the interview. On the one side we have the models of survey research, which think that the respondent is motivated for information-giving, and on the other of the clinically oriented ones which consider each answer to an interview an intense interpersonal manipulation. Running through these discussions is the realization that two different processes occur during the interview, only one of which produces the information which the researcher is after.

In this paper we shall start with the occurrence of both kinds of processes in the interview, and develop a model of interpersonal interaction in the interview, taking both into account. We shall then derive the conditions which further and hinder either of these processes and derive specific measures which can be built into an interview to measure the relative strength of each process. Finally, we shall illustrate through the secondary analysis of a completed survey how this kind of analysis of an interview process can proceed.

The Two-Game Model

The interview may be defined as a conversation with a purpose. Both parts of this definition are important. The interview consists of verbal communication between two persons. However, this communication is neither spontaneous nor solely determined by the interaction itself. From the sponsor's or interviewer's point of view, the conversation may have been well planned and a systematic record is the ultimate aim of the interview. In keeping with this formal setting, the roles of the two participants are kept distinct. The interviewer asks a standard set of questions in a standard manner, and attempts to maintain some type of record or to make some judgment on the basis of the information received. His satisfaction will by and large depend on the adequacy of this information. The respondent is thus regarded simply as the source of information; his satisfaction is not usually taken into account except at perhaps the opening or closing stages of the interview.

The question can be asked, however, as to what sorts of satisfactions a typical respondent may be attempting to obtain while being interrogated. At least two seem to stand out. On the one hand, the respondent may feel some degree of satisfaction from presenting his actual views, whatever they happen to be at that moment. In general, our culture is one in which personal integrity seems to be held at a premium and honesty thus provides its own rewards. On the other hand, our culture seems to be one in which affiliation is becoming increasingly important. As Riesmann has pointed out, we are becoming increasingly sensitive to the cues of approval and disapproval offered to us by others. Thus, at least some degree of satisfaction may be gained by the respondent if he can succeed in gaining the interviewer's positive regard.

We can thus construct a model of the interview by visualizing it as two games which the respondent is attempting to play simultaneously. The respondent's answers are his moves in both games. In the first game his pay-offs are determined by the degree to which he can express his own views. This game can be called the information-giving game. In the second, his payoffs are derived by the impression which he feels he is making on the interviewer. The better the impression, the greater the pay-offs. This game we can call the ingratiation game. The weight or the relative importance of each game may be different for different respondents and different interviewing techniques. Of course, the ideal interviewer will maximize the importance of the information-giving game, encouraging the respondent to believe that maximum pay-offs can be achieved by giving complete information. This, however, is an unusual situation for any person to find himself in. Respondents are often likely to be sensitized to the interviewer's personal preferences or the implicit preferences of the sponsor of the interview.

Conditions of the Two Games

Let us now discuss some of the variables in the construction of the interview and the characteristics of respondents which may make the information-giving game more or less important.

Interview characteristics. Apart from the skill of the interviewer, there are two ways in which personal preferences or expectations may be shown in the course of the interview. One is simply from the cumulative content of the interview. The concentration of questions on one topic, for example, usually gives the respondent sufficient cues to determine what the real intent or purpose of the interview is. Once the core content of the questions has been established, the respondent is in a better position to play the ingratiation game. Another feature is the provision of response categories by the interviewer. In contrast to a free answer or open-end question, a closed-end question provides the respondent with cues regarding the possible range of opinion which the interviewer expects from normal respondents. It has been shown that the

mere provision of a range of possible answers is an important factor in attitude formation. This may make it easier for the respondent to follow the pattern of the interviewer's preferences or expectations as well.

We are proposing here two measures of relative weight of the ingratiation game: change of response after the direction of the interview has become clear, and change when possible response categories are provided.

Respondent characteristics. Cumulative concentration on one topic and question form may make it easier for a subject to accommodate himself to the interviewer's expectations. But what kinds of respondents may be more or less willing to play the ingratiation game? In the common interviewing situation where the interviewer has no power and no control over the respondent, we can hypothesize that the respondent will put more weight on the ingratiation game if important parts of his self-image are connected with the topic under discussion. Thus a psychiatrist may feel that he has to have definite views on mental health problems or a Catholic on contraception, especially if they are approached as a psychiatrist or as a Catholic. By contrast, the information game will have the highest pay-off for individuals who are less able and less motivated to consider personal relationships with the interviewer. This characterization fits older people because of emotional detachment, members of alienated minority groups and even men in comparison to women. Persons with these characteristics will be more likely to play the information game, although there might be other difficulties in obtaining the information from them, such as inadequate communication.

Method

The data to be presented here derive from secondary analysis of a study conducted in 1950. This study was conducted by one of the top research organizations, and therefore we may be confident that gross response errors are eliminated as much as possible. Close to four thousand interviews were collected in a random sample in one city in the Southeastern United States. The general topic of the interview was attitude toward mental health problems.

The structure of the interview made it possible to apply our measures of strength of ingratiation. In accordance with standard practice the first questions were quite general, asking about problems of the town and attitudes toward human nature. Then came a series of open-ended questions presenting instances of some unusual behavior and asking for the cause and possible cures of this kind of behavior. The situations went through the life cycle starting with an undisciplined three year old, a delinquent fifteen year old, a moody twenty year old girl, and ending with an eccentric seventy-five year old. Then the second question, the one about the delinquent, was repeated, but as a closed-end question with six alternative solutions. After this list, another situation was presented, about an extremely jealous woman, and open-end answers were sought. Immediately after the open-end question, the question was repeated and alternative answers were presented.

It can be seen that this interview provides an ideal example of our model. The concentration of 4000 interviews in one city makes it possible to have significant secondary effects of ingratiation, even though the information game itself predominates. The first open-end question of the delinquent boy is presented at a point where the general trend of the interview, a study of mental health attitudes, is still obscure. Answers to it represent reactions before the ingratiation game can be played, and may unleash spontaneous views on punishment of a delinquent. The closedend question on the same topic is given after the trend must have been clear to most people. Change shows the combined effect of this knowledge and of question form. The pair of questions on the jealous woman given after the series shows the effect of question form only.

In both pairs of questions, the open-end answers could be roughly matched with the fixed categories and ordered along a dimension of relevance to the mental health content. For the delinquent boy the categorization was according to punitivity--reform school vs. psychiatric or social treatment; for the jealous woman a comparable dimension was the use of professional help -mental health oriented vs. legal. An intermediate category in both questions was ambiguous answers, answers which did not use either of the indicated alternatives or which used both. For each of the four questions we have three classes along the mental health dimension and a possible shift from minus two to plus two points. Of course, the scores of the answers to the delinquent boy and jealous woman questions cannot be compared with each other.

Ingratiation is indicated by a change toward the mental health orientation. In the delinquent boy questions, this can be due to the joint effect of increased familiarity with the tendency of the interview and the change in question form. In the jealous woman question, hardly any additional information on the purpose of the interview is given, and the change in this pair of questions can be considered to be a function of the form of the question only.

Results

Extent of shift. Table 1 shows that the shift from the open-end to the closed end question was indeed considerable on both issues. In agreement with the hypothesis that the first set of questions measured the joint effect of learning the purpose of the interview and of question form, and the second of question form only, the shift in the first set is stronger and also the pattern is different. In the situation of the boy there was a strong shift toward the nonpunitive mental health alternative, which was chosen by four-fifths of all the respondents in the closed-end questions. In the second set, the jealous women, the main change results from a

Distributions of the Four Questions

	Delinq	uent Boy	Jealous Woman			
	Open End	Open Closed Open End End End		Closed End		
Mental Health Treatment	22%	79%	33%	57%		
Other	45	5	58	16		
Punitive Treatment	33	16	9	27		
n	2969		2966			

Note: For this table all coded data in the original cards were used. In the following tables, only those answers where a definite change or constancy could be established were used, resulting in a reduced number.

Source for this and following tables: Roper Comm. No. 43, 1950.

decrease in the intermediate reactions, dividing about evenly between the punitive and supportive professionals. The main function of the alternatives seems to have been the availability of these professionals, while the general promental health attitudes were already realized in the open-end question. The difference in the two sets of questions is also shown in the amount of turnover; 43.7 per cent of the respondents stayed consistent in their attitude toward the boy, while this number increased to 54.8 per cent with the woman.

Respondent characteristics. These changes in answer show that to a certain extent a great proportion of the respondents played the ingratiation game. There are, however, differences among population groups. To indicate the absolute size of these differences we show first the percentages of shifting respondents classified according to selected population characteristics (Table 2). For the first pair of questions, the most strikingly different group is that made up of people 65 and over; 10 per cent fewer of the old respondents change toward a mental health orientation than the next younger age group. These data are made somewhat doubtful by the small number of the older group. The age trend is consistent, however, and statistically significant. Smaller differences, of the order of six percentage points, are due to sex and race. Men and Negroes tend to change their answers less. For the second set of questions, only education seems to be important, but this varies to a marked degree. Almost twice as many respondents with grade school education as with college education shift toward the advocacy of a mental health professional.

As background variables are interrelated and interact, we use multiple regression for further analysis and summary of the respondent character-

Table 2

Characteristics of Changers

Respondents		Change toward mental health	No change	Change away from mental health	N=100%			
Delinquent Boy								
Sex:	Male	58%	33%	9%	1316			
	Female	65	30	5	1495			
Race:	White	63	31	6	2433			
	Negro	57	32	11	388			
Age:	18-44	65	30	5	1682			
	45-64	62	30	7	819			
	65+	52	37	11	33			
Education: Grade school High school College		61 69 43	30 27 53	9 4 4	1280 1244 284			
Econor A & C D	mic Level B	: 52 64 63 <u>Jealous</u>	40 30 29 <u>Woman</u>	8 6 8	203 1575 909			
Sex:	Male	29	30	40	729			
	Female	28	33	40	815			
Race:	White	29	32	39	1311			
	Negro	29	27	44	237			
Age:	18-44	24	32	43	950			
	45-64	37	29	35	429			
	65+	28	37	35	172			
Educa Grad High Colle	tion: e school school ege	36 23 17	29 33 40	35 44 43	703 711 135			
Econor A & C D	mic Level B	: 24 28 31	40 32 28	36 40 40	99 843 537			

istics. The procedure used was through a multiple regression program which selects the variables in order of their contribution to the multiple correlation, and stops at a predetermined cut-off point (Table 3).

Four characteristics turn out to be significantly related to the shift toward lower punitivity in the first, delinquent boy, question. In order of importance, they are: age (young), sex (female), race (white), and economic level (low). The first three characteristics are those which we have discussed before as leading to the importance of the ingratiation game. People of lower economic level may, of course, be most con-

Table 3

Rank Orders, Betas and Standard Error of Beta of Significant Respondent Characteristics for Change of Answer

Change Toward Mental Health

Delin	quent B	oy Se	<u>Jealous Woman</u>				
<u>Variable</u> Age	<u>Beta</u> 084	<u>Beta</u> .0201	<u>Variable</u> <u>Beta</u> Education154	<u>Beta</u> .0278			
Sex	.054	.0201					
Race	042	.0204					
Economic Level	036	•0204					
Multiple R = .11, F = 6.56, $p \le .01$			Multiple R = .15 F = 30.54 , p < .02	, 1			

cerned with the treatment of the delinquent boy and be ambivalent about it. They are one of the most punitive groups to the open-ended question-only 16 per cent of the lowest economic group advocate the non-punitive treatment in the openend question, as compared to 35 per cent of the upper group; but they are ready to change, given a chance.

We have postulated the first set of questions as a joint effect of learning the direction the interview is going to take and the provision of possible "mental health" answers in the closed-end questions as well. In the second set of questions, learning the rules of the ingratiation game should have been completed. Thus only lack of knowledge of the possible alternatives would make the difference between open- and closed-end questions. Indeed, we find that the only trait which relates to change in the "jealous woman" pair is education. The low-educated person, who has less readily available information on professional help, changes his answer when presented with a list of possibilities. The other traits which identified the persons wanting to learn the rules of the ingratiation game are not significantly involved in change of answer at this point.

Effect on relations of questions. The preceding analysis of the two games helps us in understanding the variables entering into the answers to the different questions themselves. We can do this by examining the relative importance contributed to the mental health aspects of the four population characteristics and in addition of one general attitude question which corresponds to an underlying dimension of the opinions expressed and so show the relative importance of idea orientation in the different questions. This was a four-step scale of faith in people, ranging from, "Most people are basically bad," to "Most people are basically good." As a measure of weight of the games we are using beta values (partial regression coefficients) and their standard errors and showing the total influence of these secondary effects--i.e., the interviewing errors--by the multiple correlation coefficients.

The first question, on the delinquent boy, in its open-ended form, can be taken as the best expression of information orientation, before the respondent has been exposed to a series of mental health questions and provided with possible alternatives. We see here that education, sex and economic level are the most important variables which affect the answer. The general underlying attitude, faith in people, is also an

Table 4

Rank Orders, Betas and F-Values of Significant Respondent Characteristics for Four Questions

Delinquent Boy				Jealous Woman							
Op	en_End		<u>C1o</u>	sed End		Op	en End		C10	sed End	
<u>Variable</u> Education	<u>Beta</u> .122	SE <u>Beta</u> .0219	<u>Variable</u> Sex	<u>Beta</u> .144	SE <u>Beta</u> .0194	<u>Variable</u> Education	<u>Beta</u> .176	SE <u>Beta</u> .0263	<u>Variable</u> Race	<u>Beta</u> .055	SE <u>Beta</u> .0229
Sex	.072	.0201	Age	143	.0206	Sex	.114	.0258	Education	050	.0229
Faith in People	.071	.0201	Race	101	.0198	Faith in People	.081	.0264			
Economic Level	.073	.0210	Education	.090	.0216	Race	063	.0258			
Race	052	.0200	Faith in People	.068	.0199						
Age	035	.0208	Economic Level	042	.0208						
Multiple F = 20.89	R = .22	, , 1	Multipl F = 35.	e R = .: 90, p <	28, .01	Multi F = 2	ple R = 1.53, p	.24, <.01	Mult F =	iple R = 5.32, p	= .07, <.05

important variable. Better-educated women of upper economic levels are more likely to be not punitive in this situation. Race (being white) and age (being young) also lead to less punitivity but are less important.

By the time the same question was asked in the closed answer form, the shifts have occurred which we are attributing to the ingratiation game. For some people the change reinforced the previous direction: Women, younger people, and to a lesser degree whites, were less punitive to begin with and also likely to accept the point of view of the interview. We find now sex, age and race the most significant variables, while education which did not lead to the ingratiation game has slipped to a lower place, as has faith in people. Economic level, as we indicated previously, leads to conflicting responses and now is barely significant.

In the open-ended jealous woman question, sex, race, and faith in people stay important, as in the previous question. Education is of paramount importance here; as we have indicated, mainly because education is needed for knowledge about different professional help. Indeed, in the closed-end question the importance of education is reversed, lower-educated people turning more to the mental health profession, and race remaining the most important characteristic to predict the answer. Idea orientation, as represented by faith in people, has lost its influence. As we had surmised, this game loses in relative importance during the course of the interview.

Conclusion

Our model has made it possible for us to distinguish the information-giving and ingratiation processes in the results of a survey. Although the data were not collected for this purpose, we could gain an impression of the relative weight of both processes and of the effect which they had on specific relationships. With a complete experimental design woven into a questionnaire, the two games and their relative weight can be stated in a specific quantitative form and the conditions under which the respondent gains maximum pay-off can be tested. Thus it can be hoped that this model can point a way for a method to check on the interview process during the data collection.

FOOTNOTE

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