

Proefstuderen Geschiedenis

24 maart 2023



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Introductie

Een student Geschiedenis vertelt hoe jouw eerste jaar bij deze opleiding er uit zal zien.

Hoorcollege

Titel

Nederlandse Geschiedenis

Korte omschrijving

Het hoorcollege Nederlandse Geschiedenis op de proefstudeerdag geeft een indruk van de manier waarop het va in de afgelopen eeuw is veranderd van aard en perspectief, en laat dit zien aan de hand van voorbeelden uit de geschiedenis van de Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC) en de West-Indische Compagnie (WIC).

Docent: Prof. dr. Michiel van Groesen (m.van.groesen@hum.leidenuniv.nl)

Michiel van Groesen is hoogleraar Zeegeschiedenis aan de Universiteit Leiden en één van de vaste docenten van het hoorcollege Nederlandse Geschiedenis in het eerste jaar van de opleiding Geschiedenis. Hij is gespecialiseerd in de geschiedenis van de West-Indische Compagnie en is auteur van het boek *Amsterdam's Atlantic: Print Culture and the Making of Dutch Brazil* (2017).

Werkcollege 1

Titel

Oral History

Korte omschrijving

Iedere contemporair historicus krijgt ermee te maken: informatie die nergens op schrift staat, maar wel is opgeslagen in de geheugens van betrokkenen. In dit college leer je die informatie opdiepen door het houden van interviews. Hoe benader je iemand die je wilt interviewen? Welke vragen stel je? Hoe leg je een gesprek vast? Hoe weet je of een herinnering betrouwbaar is? En hoe analyseer en verwerk je het interviewmateriaal?

Docent: Jamel Buhari (j.l.j.buhari@hum.leidenuniv.nl)

Jamel Buhari is promovendus aan het Instituut voor Geschiedenis. Hij is gespecialiseerd in migratiegeschiedenis en seksualiteit, en kijkt naar ontwikkelingen rondom LGBTQ+ migratie naar Nederland met een focus op Afrikaanse LGBTQ+ immigranten. Buhari heeft een BA in International Studies en een MA in History: Governance of Migration and Diversity, beide aan de Universiteit Leiden.

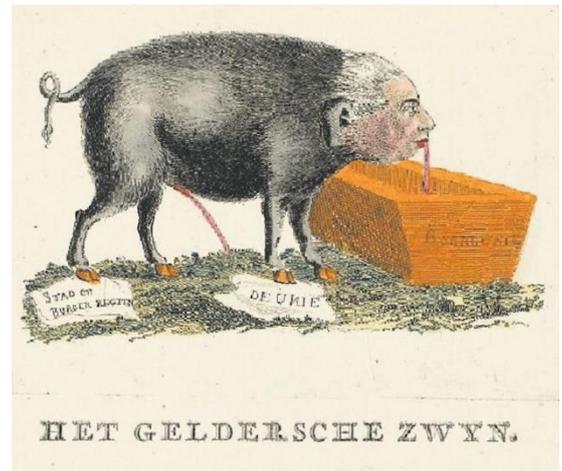
Werkcollege 2

Titel

Nederlandse Geschiedenis

Korte omschrijving

Aan het einde van de achttiende eeuw vonden er grote revoluties plaats in Amerika (1776), Frankrijk (1789), maar ook in Nederland. In deze periode is er heftige politieke strijd gaande tussen verschillende groepen. Uit deze strijd wordt ook het moderne Nederland geboren. Ook verandert de *manier* waarop politiek wordt bedreven. Steeds meer kan ook het 'gewone' of 'lagere' volk zich met de politiek bemoeien. In dit proefcollege gaan we nader in op de politieke betrokkenheid van het gewone volk: hoe konden gewone mensen uiting geven aan hun politieke gevoelens? Hoe werden politieke verschillen op straat uitgevochten?



Docent: Dirk Alkemade MA (d.g.a.alkemade@hum.leidenuniv.nl)

Mijn naam is Dirk Alkemade, ik ben docent en onderzoeker bij de afdeling Nederlandse Geschiedenis. Als promovendus ben ik bezig met een groot onderzoek naar het Nederlandse revolutietijdvak rond 1800, waarin ik in het bijzonder kijk naar een groep radicalen die te vuur en te zwaard probeerden democratie in te voeren. Als je vragen hebt, voel je vrij om mij te mailen.

Q&A

Heb je nog vragen over de opleiding? Dan kan de student die hier allemaal beantwoorden!

Voorbereiding

Lees voor het hulpvak Oral History Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording oral history. A guide for the humanities and social sciences*. Third edition (New York 2015), Hoofdstuk 1: Introduction to the In-depth Interview, pg. 10-40.

Om deel te nemen aan het werkcollege Nederlandse Geschiedenis moet je een aantal dingen voorbereiden:

- Kijk de aflevering van 'Het verhaal van Nederland' over de patriotten en prinsgezinden (<https://hetverhaalvannederland.ntr.nl/uitzendingen/aflevering-8-patriotten-en-prinsgezinden-1750-1850/>)
- Lees de tekst: 'Oproerig mosselwif, rebelse bakker en vette lector. Orangisme tijdens de patriottentijd' van Rick Honings (<https://www.rickhonings.nl/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Oproerig-mosselwif-rebelse-bakker.pdf>)

Beantwoord de volgende vragen na het kijken van de aflevering:

1. Welk beeld ontstaat hier van stadhouder Willem V?
2. Noem een aantal punten waarop de patriotten het beleid van Willem V aanvielen.
3. Wat zijn de belangrijkste politieke gebeurtenissen in de jaren na de vlucht van Willem V in 1795?

Beantwoord de volgende vragen na het lezen van de tekst:

4. Wat trok mensen aan in het orangisme? Waarom was de stadhouder belangrijk voor hen?
5. Noem een aantal verschillende manieren waarop mensen hun voor- of afkeur voor het orangisme konden uiten.

Probeer iedere vraag te beantwoorden met ongeveer 50 à 100 woorden. Probeer de vragen genuanceerd te beantwoorden (enerzijds ... anderzijds...; ten eerste ... ten tweede...).

Introduction to the In-Depth Interview

RECENTLY A DEVELOPMENT HAS BEEN GOING ON IN THE FIELDS OF EDUCATION, anthropology, oral history, folklore, biographical literature, psychology, and humanistic sociology. This has been spurred in part by feminist psychologists, historians, and anthropologists and in part by men and women writing literary biography, humanistic sociology, and ethnography. This development is centered on a concern about the process of meaning making.

Many of us who use the in-depth interview are interested in how the respondents interpret experience and how we, the questioners, interject ourselves into this process. We try to be conscious of the effects of the research process on both interviewer and narrator. We—both interviewers and narrators—are influenced by the culture we live in. Sociologist Judith Stacey described this as the realization that writing about people “is not cultural reportage, but cultural construction, and always a construction of self as well as of the other.”¹

We are also concerned about the ways power relationships based on knowledge, gender, race, class, status, age, and ethnicity impinge on the interview situation. We strive to be aware of when and how these conditions affect the narrator and interviewer as they interact and how they influence the testimony recorded.

Indeed, there has been a shift in attitude about the relationship of interviewer to narrator in in-depth interviews. Formerly, the relationship of researcher (who plays the role of authoritative scholar) to narrator (who is the passive yielder of data) was one of subject to object. In our view now, power may be unequal, but both interviewer and narrator are seen as having knowledge of the events and situations to be examined as well as deficits in information and understanding. Although the interviewer brings to the interviewing situation a perspective and knowledge based on research in a discipline, the narrator brings intimate knowledge of his or her own life and often a different perspective. The interviewer thus sees the work as a collaboration.²

This is the underlying assumption in this book; the term for it, first proposed by historian Michael Frisch and now widely used to describe this dynamic, is “shared authority.”³ In practice, the conduct of the interview, the disposition of the tapes, the written account of the historical event discussed and the interpretation are the responsibility of the interviewer/historian, while the subject explored in the interview is the domain of the narrator who has lived it. Two authorities are active here, and they share authority and responsibility for creating a worthwhile historical document. (This is not always an untroubled relationship, however. See the discussion at the end of chapter 11, “Analysis and Interpretation.”)

In striving to see the world as the narrator sees it, we realize that this stance compels us to have compassion for the narrator. We cannot work with complete objectivity and don’t want to.

As for “oral history,” it does not fit neatly into one category of disciplines. Alessandro

Portelli, a professor of American literature at the University of Rome and a leader in the field of oral history, explains that the oral historian is like a detective and a psychoanalyst on one hand and a literary critic and historian on the other. We find and track down clues about what happened; we listen to the accounts, silently and openly asking questions about the replies to our questions. We revel in the language, noticing every word choice, every expression, every symbol. We seek a narrative that informs us in some way about our culture and history.

You will see in this book that my thinking has been enriched by research and debates not only in history but in other disciplines, as well: I draw examples from the work of scholars in anthropology, sociology, psychology, education, health care, literary studies, and folklore. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz sums up this unabashed borrowing from other disciplines: “Everybody seems to be minding everybody else’s business.”⁴

In this book we will indeed proceed “to mind everybody else’s business.” This guide is intended for all who use the recorded in-depth interview in their research and are open to reflecting on ethics and interpersonal relationships as well as gaining information about interviewing techniques. Admittedly there is an emphasis on historical research because my own work has been centered on historical issues. For example, I emphasize the life history approach rather than the present-centered interview. Nevertheless, I often discuss specifically issues in in-depth interviewing that concern readers in other disciplines when they diverge from those of historians.

An oral history interview is an in-depth interview, and I present it in the context of the general field of qualitative research. This first chapter contains an explanation of terms used in referring to the recorded in-depth interview. There is a brief discussion about differences between qualitative and quantitative research methods. I consider the ways that oral history as a research methodology can enlighten us. I suggest appropriate uses of the in-depth interview. And I discuss its limitations, as well as ways to deal with limitations.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE USE OF ORAL HISTORY

Most writers begin books on oral history by reminding readers that the first oral historian was Thucydides, who sought people to interview and used their information in writing the history of the Peloponnesian War. Use of personal testimony in the investigation of society has never ceased. But in the twentieth century, a new technology made the recording of testimony easier. Early in the century, recording onto wax cylinders by using heavy, cumbersome recording machines, folklorists recorded not only music but short interviews with the people making music. However, widespread use of the tape-recorded interview was possible only after World War II, when portable recording machines became available. So, although the use of data from individual memory is at least as old as the fifth century BCE, the mechanical recording of the in-depth interview is not so old—not much more than eighty years, in fact.

In 1948 Alan Nevins, at Columbia University, began to tape-record the spoken memories of white male elites: this was the first organized oral history project.⁵ At that time, heavy, cumbersome reel-to-reel recording machines were being used. Soon lighter machines were invented and marketed, and by the 1960s the easy-to-carry tape recorder using cassettes had

become the standard equipment. Also in the 1960s, an interest in recording the memories of people other than elites became paramount among academics.

Because of this interest and technical improvements in tape recorders, by 1965 there were eighty-nine oral history projects ongoing in the United States, and the number of projects has grown in each year since then.⁶ At the same time, the easy portability of cassette, and then digital, recorders enhanced the sound quality of interviews by folklorists, ethnographers, sociologists, and psychologists whose research was based on qualitative methodology. Although each discipline uses the in-depth interview in somewhat different ways, the practical and theoretical problems tend to cut across disciplinary boundaries. A simple search on the Internet will show you the great number of oral history programs in the United States now. Journals devoted to oral history and directories of oral history projects in English-speaking countries (and in Western Europe) as well as Internet resources appear in the recommended reading section at the end of the chapter.

DEFINITION OF ORAL HISTORY

The question, *What is oral history anyway?* has stymied nearly all of us at one point or another. Oral historians have probably devoted more energy to definitional issues and problems of application of this term than other disciplines. I'll venture a working definition: Oral history is the recording of personal testimony delivered in oral form with purposes beyond the recording itself. Charles Morrissey, an oral historian, searched for the origin of the term *oral history* and traced it to a New York citizen of the nineteenth century.⁷ Nevins called what he was doing "oral history."⁸ But what is oral history? Is it the recorded memoir? Is it the typewritten transcript? Is it the research method that involves in-depth interviewing? The term refers to all three. Lamentations have been heard about the inadequacy, the imprecision, the misleading character of the term, but is it possible to find a better one? In this book, I use several terms interchangeably with oral history. James Bennett mentioned a string of them in his speech to the annual meeting of the Oral History Association in 1982, among them, *recorded life history*, *recorded narrative*, *recorded life story*, *recorded memoir*.⁹ The terms used here—*in-depth interview*, *recorded memoir*, *recorded life history*, *recorded memories*, *recorded life review*, *oral history*—imply that there is someone else involved who frames the topics and inspires the narrator to begin the act of remembering, jogs memory, and records and presents the narrator's words.

Most of these terms have also been used in cognate disciplines. Although theorists have proposed a set of more technically specific meanings for each term, these meanings seem not to have caught on, and the terms remain interchangeable. *Oral history* seems to be the term most frequently used to refer to the recorded in-depth interview.

ORAL HISTORY: STILL A NEW KID ON THE BLOCK

Social scientists, in general, are trained to view manufacturing the evidence as the worst thing one can do. They will permit evidence to be "massaged" and "manipulated," but not made up. The recorded in-depth interview is a research method that is based on direct intervention by the observer and on the evocation of evidence. In the sense that the evidence was not tangible

in these words exactly until the interviewer recorded it, and that the evidence is the result of the interviewer's questioning, this is the making of evidence.

But return to the first historians, the Greeks: they were not troubled about the issue of recording these answers and considering them evidence. They cheerfully (I guess) used the accounts related for them to write their histories. Nevertheless, many historians trained in research methods rooted in the Germanic "scientific school" of the nineteenth century cast a suspicious glance at oral history. They rely mainly on written records and on a critical examination of them. In the latter part of this chapter I will suggest ways of subjecting the orally transmitted document to the same critical examination with which written documents are evaluated.

Many sociologists and other social scientists today still hold the view that quantitative research is the only way to be certain about evidence. They have grave reservations about qualitative research because they view it as uncontrolled and lacking in the rigorous procedures followed by quantitative researchers. They are uncomfortable with the subjectivity inherent in qualitative research and strive to get rid of it as much as possible. But the subjectivity of the process did not bother the Greeks: they knew that their witnesses and they themselves were human beings involved in the process of living and observing what was going on around them and to them, even as they recorded memories and observations. They realized that they could not extract themselves from the story. I argue that awareness of our biases and preconceptions, the limitations of our experience and preferences, brings us closer to an understanding of how we influence our research and interpretation, whether it is qualitative or quantitative.

Qualitative methodology has its own body of strict standards for procedure and evaluation. Standards for the recorded in-depth interview as a research method and a critical evaluation of procedures are the subjects discussed in the chapters that follow.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AND QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH: COMPARISONS

Sharan Merriam, in the book *Case Study Research in Education: A Qualitative Approach*, explains that the quantitative researcher assesses a limited number of variables by examining researcher-controlled answers, trying to find out whether a preconceived hypothesis is operating, whether the prediction that certain variables cause certain effects will hold true.¹⁰ By using a questionnaire requiring short answers, a researcher can query a large number of subjects. The subjects are selected in such a way that they are representative of the population studied. Therefore, researchers can make generalizations with a degree of confidence.

Qualitative research does not involve manipulation of a few variables. Rather, Merriam argues, this kind of research is inductive, and a multiplicity of variables and their relationships are considered not in isolation but as being interrelated in the life context.¹¹ The in-depth interview enables the researcher to give the subject leeway to answer as he or she chooses, to attribute meanings to the experiences under discussion, and to interject topics. In this way, new hypotheses may be generated.

The origins of the data used in these two ways of finding answers to questions about human society are at their foundations similar: observations of human behavior. British oral historian

Paul Thompson reminds readers that the basic sources of information that statisticians use—census data, registrations of birth, marriage, and death—are suspect. Marriage registers, for example, sometimes contain false information about age because couples did not want the official to know they were still of the age that required parental consent.¹² Birthdates are sometimes falsified to present a nine-month interval between marriage and birth of the first child. People may give census takers false information, sometimes because they do not understand what the census taker means, sometimes because they do not trust the census taker. People may answer questionnaires in a slapdash way because they are in a hurry or because they do not value the research topic. British historian Trevor Lummis sums up this idea: “So even ‘hard’ contemporary statistical data is only what somebody told somebody and if they have good reason and the opportunity to conceal the truth, then the ‘facts’ will be erroneous.”¹³ All of us who study humans—whether with quantitative or qualitative methods—know that we cannot hold our conclusions with absolute certainty.

One advantage in using qualitative methodology is that, because the researcher does not adhere to an unchangeable testing instrument, he or she is open to recording discussion on the informants’ choice of topics. In this way, the researcher learns new things not in the original hypothesis—in fact, many qualitative researchers do not form hypotheses at the beginning of the research. An example of finding something outside the researcher’s thinking comes from sociologist Arlene Daniels, who studies organization of work, especially unwritten codes of behavior. In a project on military psychiatrists, if she had used a questionnaire whose data she could then easily quantify, she would not have asked a question about sexuality. Earlier information would not have suggested that she do so unless the subject was sexual dysfunction, which the psychiatrist would treat clinically. Instead, in the in-depth interviews she conducted, she found that narrators wanted to talk about secret sexual practices. Daniels realized that ways to handle these were indicative of informal controls. When wives of high-ranking officers began affairs with lower-ranking officers, the local military psychiatrist would send the offender to a hospital for evaluation and possible treatment. Thus, the psychiatrist provided a short-term but effective solution to a non-psychiatric problem. By listening and allowing her narrators to teach her, Daniels discovered an aspect of behavior among members of the military that was not previously in her thinking.¹⁴

This possibility of discovering something not even thought of before is an advantage of the method. However, in-depth interviews are time-consuming, and so the qualitative researcher cannot examine the number of cases that the quantitative researcher can. Generalizations about a wider population have to be held tentatively.

And yet, the researcher seeking a diverse group of narrators can learn about varying aspects of the phenomenon he or she studies. In 1946, an American psychologist David Boder decided to go to Europe to record the memories of Holocaust survivors. He found his narrators in Displaced Persons camps and recorded their testimony using a heavy wire recorder machine (state of the art at the time). The result was 130 interviews, many of them published in his book *I Did Not Interview the Dead*.¹⁵ Among the first to record Holocaust testimony, he explained to a narrator why he had undertaken this large project. He said no one can say how it really was.

You see that is why I talk to many. That is why I interview many and have them tell their story. So from the little that I get from everyone, the mosaic, a total picture can be assembled. Now you understand my purpose.¹⁶

One aim in quantitative research is to reduce as much as possible the influence of the researcher's bias. However, because it is the researcher who forms the research questions, the bias is present from the beginning. The researcher interprets the search results: the probability of bias is there as well. Now, with the influence of postmodernism, many researchers are likely to acknowledge that interpretation of a narrator's life story is as much "an act of social construction as any other kind of research."¹⁷

I used to believe that subjectivity is more intrusive in qualitative research because the researcher is constantly interacting with the people being studied. Yet all research is characterized by subjectivity, simply because the research begins, progresses, and ends with the researcher. No matter how many controls the researcher may put on the research process and interpretation, the resulting document will reflect to some extent the researcher's own assumptions. Sociologist Jack Douglas describes the way the qualitative researcher acknowledges and uses his or her bias, but what he says could equally apply to the quantitative researcher: "Rather than trying to eliminate the subjective effects, the goal must be to try to understand how they are interdependent, how different forms of subjective interaction with the people we are studying affect our conclusions about them, and so on."¹⁸ In later chapters of this book, ways to reflect on our own assumptions and biases are discussed.

I do not intend to insinuate that quantitative research and qualitative research are necessarily antithetical approaches. Quantification has its appropriate use, as does qualitative research. The kind of question asked leads to the choice of research method. For example, oral historian Fern Ingersoll and anthropologist Jasper Ingersoll worked together on a project in southern Thailand, using field techniques from anthropology and oral history as well as population data gathered by sociologists. By observing behaviors and conducting in-depth interviews and focus group interviews, they sought an understanding of the way income was experienced in the daily life of the families.¹⁹ If they had chosen to do so, they could have also studied quantitative data and arrived at two dimensions of the society they studied—actual level of income as well as perceived level.

Qualitative methods and quantitative methods are also profitably used together when data from in-depth interviews are coded and expressed mathematically. In the example given above, the Ingersolls could have analyzed the total content of all the individual interviews in terms of answers to particular questions, assigning each answer to a category and giving each category a number. Statistical analysis could have then been feasible. Researchers may also use an in-depth interviewing project to suggest hypotheses that can be tested by using a questionnaire with a larger sample drawn from the population being studied.

THE IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW AS A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHOD

The recorded in-depth interview, or oral history, is a specific research method within the general designation of qualitative methodology and is close to the basic principle of grounded theory. The qualitative researcher learns about a way of life by studying the people who live it and asking them what they think about their experiences. The many examples they offer in their

testimony are carefully studied. The term used to describe the close examination of examples that yields the hypothesis is grounded theory, an approach originated in 1967 by sociologists Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser.²⁰ Thick description, a term coined by ethnographer Clifford Geertz, is the goal—not a single view of the experience—but a large enough number of testimonies so that great variety in detail is obtained.²¹

Although the in-depth interview is close to the basic principle of grounded theory, the theory refers to other kinds of observations of behavior besides the interview. Grounded theorists often employ coding as a way to separate information into categories for analysis, a strategy not often used by historians but certainly used by other social scientists. Another important difference between oral history and grounded theory lies in the emphasis oral historians place on the formation of questions that guide the research.

Some proponents of grounded theory insist on approaching research without preconceptions or hypotheses. Social scientists such as Leonard Schatzman and Anselm Strauss warned against having any preconceived notions before beginning the research.²² For others, there is acceptance of the researcher's starting with articulated problems or questions that guide the interview process. Sociologist Kathy Charmaz authored *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis*, which delineates up-to-date developments in this kind of qualitative research, including the debate about whether to start research with or without hypotheses.²³

Some historians as well as other researchers use hypotheses based on previous knowledge—these are tested and discarded as the evidence suggests other explanations. Other historians do not test hypotheses but have in mind some questions that they pursue with the aim of finding answers so they can construct a narrative. British historian and philosopher R. G. Collingwood stresses that the historian does not collect data without questions to guide the search: “It is only when he has a problem in his mind that he can begin to search for data bearing on it.”²⁴

It is important to acknowledge that there are at least assumptions—if not hypotheses or questions—that direct the oral historian's attention to some aspects of the study and not to others. By being conscious of these, we can become aware of how they affect the research process.

THE INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO THE IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW

Researchers from different disciplines use the in-depth interview differently, although interviewing techniques may be the same. According to your discipline, you will no doubt combine it with other methods. For historians, this will mean a thorough search for other primary sources. For many anthropologists, it will be close observation of behaviors over a long period of living in the research field. For sociologists, it will probably be fieldwork as well as analysis of aggregate data such as census reports or survey research results. But these methods may be used by all three: the boundaries between disciplines are artificial. Often a more helpful question is simply, Given my research question, what do I need to do to find the answer?

The kind of research question you ask, however, is often the result of the questions you have pursued as you acquired knowledge in a particular discipline. For example, ethnography and

history ask somewhat different questions of narrators. Historians cannot stop with asking questions about how things are but also concern themselves with the general question, How did things get to be the way they are? This catapults them into an examination of sources of information about the past. Among disciplines, there is often a difference in the way the received information is handled. The historian's aim is to preserve the in-depth interview as a historical document, and this requires recording it and making it available to others. Historians are reluctant to assign anonymity to the narrator because other scholars interested in the information must be able to identify the witness, to look critically at the source of information.

USES OF RECORDED IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Whatever the particular approach or discipline, the in-depth interview can offer answers to questions that no other methodology can provide.²⁵ Oral history enables us to see the topic of research in terms of actual experience. Historian Michael Frisch said that oral history “presents such sophisticated and complex issues in the form of lived experience and living conversation” that these issues can then be dealt with in concrete terms.²⁶

Consider ways the oral history interview is used. First of all, oral history preserves a historical record in cases where documents or physical remains no longer exist. In places where records that are not approved by authorities are destroyed, survivors of events like genocide try to find some means of recording their memories lest knowledge of what happened is lost.²⁷ At an international conference on biography in 2010, I sat mesmerized listening to the accounts of Chinese participants who described their efforts to record memories of life during earlier times when discussion of negative experiences and attitudes were not allowed by the government. Then, it was dangerous to speak out loud or write down these memories. Now, Chinese historians want to get memories recorded as soon as possible so that future generations can know their history.²⁸

In other circumstances, too, missing evidence can be recovered only by means of oral testimony. This is especially important when we need to know *underlying reasons* for a decision for which there is no record. If there is a record, it states the decision blandly and only in general terms. We might read that “the motion was made, seconded, and voted,” but we have no way of knowing what the participants intended when they voted a certain way. Real motivation rarely appears in official written records, although an ostensible reason may be given for public consumption. The in-depth interview is indispensable for probing behind the public-oriented statement. Once, when reading the minutes of a hospital board, I saw that a brilliant physician and creative administrator had handed in his resignation and that it had been accepted. As soon as I could interview the head of the hospital's board at the time, I asked him what happened those thirty years ago. He gave me a blow-by-blow description, explaining the underlying antithetical views of the hospital administration and the physician. As board members and physician discussed these differences, antagonism escalated. None of this was in the hospital board's minutes.²⁹

We can discover the reasons why ordinary people made decisions that in the aggregate influenced history but are nowhere written down. For example, why did parents in farm families continue to limit family size from the nineteenth into the twentieth centuries? Were

there material reasons? Were there psychological reasons? Social reasons? Asking questions that involve this kind of personal, complex decision can best be done in the in-depth interview.

The in-depth interview reveals other kinds of information that do not get into the public record. Sometimes people would rather not admit some things to the census taker—such as who is living with whom. Tax payers may underestimate the value of renovations to property when filling out forms for the county tax office. And underlying the official accounts of “accidental death” are stories of despair on both the personal and societal level. If the interviewer presents no danger and is an empathic listener, these kinds of information may be articulated.

Much business is transacted orally. It is not a matter of supplementing the written record or explaining it because there are no written records. For example, important decisions are arrived at over the telephone. People rarely save electronic mail messages. (The technology of faxing documents is an exception to this situation.) Business deals of importance for thousands of workers are discussed over lunch. A final decision on policy is settled while two people are riding up in the elevator to the nineteenth floor. Out on the course, while carefully choosing the right golf club, an executive fires his subordinate who has come along anticipating a relaxing round. There is no record of the firing; indeed, the only written record is the positive portrayal in the recommendation the executive writes for him.

The interview method permits questioning of the witness. In his book *Listening to History*, Trevor Lummis explains, “One precise advantage of oral evidence is that it is interactive and one is not left alone, as with documentary evidence, to divine its significance; the ‘source’ can reflect upon the content and offer interpretation as well as facts.”³⁰ Certainly an obvious (but not intrinsic) use of oral history projects is that they often involve recording life histories among all socioeconomic levels of the population. In the past, only the well-to-do documented their lives. They not only had a sense of their own importance and were literate, but they also had the leisure and staff support to write. Because they were the ones who held power, their accounts of their lives were usually consonant with accounts in official documents. This was the situation British oral historian Bill Williams encountered when he began research among Jewish immigrants in Manchester, England. There were plenty of written records, but they had a particular slant:

Insofar as the immigrants survive in the written record they do so chiefly in accounts composed by an older-established Anglo-Jewish elite, with a vested interest in rapid assimilation, or of the majority society, where they appear most frequently either as the “foreign refuse” of anti-alienism or as the pale reflection of middle-class liberalism.³¹

There were no documents written by the Jewish immigrants themselves about their lives.

Oral history recordings give people who are not usually asked questions about their lives a chance to speak. Paul Thompson comments on the paucity of written evidence for the history of working men and women: “The more personal, local, and unofficial a document, the less likely it was to survive.” He lists the official documents that were deliberately saved to shape a view of the past wanted by those in power: legal documents, correspondence of landowners, account books from private firms. He concludes, “But of the innumerable postcards, letters, diaries, and ephemera of working-class men and women, or the papers of small businesses like corner

shops or hill farmers, for example, very little has been preserved anywhere.”³² Oral history research thus becomes crucial to obtaining a picture of the total society because the viewpoints of the non-elite, who do not leave memoirs or have biographers, are presented.

On the other hand, sometimes in researching contemporary history, we are overwhelmed by the abundance of written documents. Much depends on the topic. Government requirements, such as documentation for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in the United States, result in a flood of paper. Oral history testimony can help us understand what was significant to the people who made the documents or lived through the times when the documents had power. Such testimony can reveal which documents are important enough to net from the waves of paper.

Oral history testimony is the kind of information that makes other public documents understandable. For example, we may know the average wage of unskilled male workers from looking at government data. What we cannot know unless we ask is how the man supplemented his wage with other work, how the woman found seasonal and part-time jobs and grew food in a kitchen garden and processed it and made over old clothes for the children, and how the children took baby-sitting jobs and ran errands for money and did unpaid work for their parents.³³

Oral history reveals daily life at home and at work—the very stuff that rarely gets into any kind of public record. Thompson says that these are the areas where we can begin to see how social change is operating.³⁴ North Carolina mill workers, talking about courtship practices during and just after World War I, described not being allowed to be alone with a sweetheart. A chaperone was always in the parlor with them—one couple sat side by side and held hands under the sofa pillow. Then a few people were able to buy cars. At first, the chaperone went along, riding in the backseat. Then another couple went along—safety in numbers. Then two sweethearts started going out in the car alone.³⁵ Courting practices changed forever. Concrete details in these oral histories make understandable the textbook generalizations about the advent of the automobile changing social life.

The in-depth interview can reveal the informal, unwritten rules of relating to others that characterize any group. I reflect now on my interviewing project among artists in a women’s cooperative gallery. The formal rule was that if an artist could not pay her dues after a stated length of time, she would be expelled from membership. In practice, the women were reluctant to expel anyone. They always found some strategy to keep the artist with them if she wanted to stay.³⁶ Another rule was that membership was open to both men and women, and indeed men regularly exhibited at the gallery. But when asked if they would vote for a man to become a regular member, the women hedged and finally indicated that that would be a hard decision to make.³⁷ (A few years after my research project was completed, they did vote men into membership.)

The ramifications of personal relationships that do not get mentioned in official documents are revealed. Again I am reminded of the art gallery and of a heated discussion that went on for months over the difference between art and craft. Hard positions were taken: individuals seemed unmovable. As time went by, they softened their positions. Friendships mattered too

much for anyone to maintain a rigid stance; in the end, personal relationships were more important even than the definitions of their work. And only in the in-depth interviews did the interweaving of personal relationships, work, and definitions of work become clear.³⁸

It is through oral history that the dimensions of life within a community are illuminated. Studying the role of the two churches in the mill village of a century ago showed me how this can come about. Their church programs in which members offered songs and poetry emphasized family and mutual help. Often my narrators sang their songs for me or recited a few lines of poetry. Their testimony gave such accounts as that of taking into the house two maiden aunts when they were old and could not work. In the mill, people also helped one another. If a spinner was trying to tie a broken thread and another thread broke, a fellow worker would leave her machines and come over to help.³⁹ I learned that the definition of what it meant to be “a good person” was linked to a commitment to help one another and was experienced in several ways and dimensions in this mill village. There was nothing about this in the mill records or in superintendents’ observations of workers. Lummis sums up this important use of recorded testimony: “There is no doubt that the strength of having the account of the various dimensions of life together in one lived experience gives all the data a particular strength lacking in virtually any other source of evidence; and certainly lacking in any other widespread documentary form.”⁴⁰

Individual testimony incorporates different aspects of experience at any moment, and these moments can be arranged chronologically to reveal development. Paul Thompson points out the use of oral history to help us understand change over time, to correct a static view of human experience by showing a dynamic view. Thompson writes, “Oral history is a connecting value which moves in all sorts of different directions. It connects the old and the young, the academic world and the world outside, but more specifically it allows us to make connections in the interpretation of history; for example, between different places, or different spheres, or different phases of life.”⁴¹

Personal testimony enables the researcher to understand the meaning of artifacts in the lives of people. British historian Raphael Samuel, discussing artifacts such as a measuring book and a price list, explains: “Sources like this may only come to life when there are people to explain, to comment and to elaborate on them, when there are other kinds of information to set against them, and a context of custom and practice in which they can be set.”⁴² In the mill village just before World War I, a family saved enough money to buy an organ for the two daughters. If I had seen “organ” in a list of household goods, I would have regarded this artifact as a tangible symbol of “the arts” among working-class people. For the narrator it was the symbol of the intimate bond between her sister and herself as they shared the organ in their adult lives after they married and lived in separate houses.⁴³

The in-depth interview also reveals the images and the symbols people use to express feelings about their experiences and give them meaning. In his book *Listening to Old Voices*, Patrick Mullen describes a man (born in 1900) who had come from a background of poverty to landownership and from a wayward life to that of a lay preacher. This narrator took Mullen to

the top of the highest mountain on his land, the landscape symbolizing his rise from poverty to prosperity, from sin to spiritual elevation.⁴⁴

The in-depth interview can reveal a psychological reality that is the basis for ideals the individual holds and for the things he or she does. There is no better way to glean information on how the subject sees and interprets his experience than to ask in the context of the life review. In past times, historians searched for a diary or personal journal, only to be disappointed by finding a daily account of weather and a brief synopsis of events. The ones that offered the writer's interpretations of the events on a psychological level were rare.

Such a situation arose during research John Bodnar conducted among Polish immigrants to the United States. He says that as a social scientist he might have seen immigration only in the context of economic and social forces. Using one of the oral histories to illustrate his point, Bodnar shows how the narrator expressed his experience in terms of the struggle to move from dependency on others to independence. In his personal psychology, independence was necessary to this narrator's sense of being a worthwhile person: the achievement of independence, rather than money, was the most important thing to him.⁴⁵

Oral history research may also reveal the actions of individuals who have no one to witness for history their heroism or provide for future generations the evidence of their tragedy. Alessandro Portelli's book on a World War II tragedy, *The Order Has Been Carried Out: History, Memory, and Meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome*, presents the evidence of German troops' retaliation for the deaths of 33 Germans by killing 335 Italians they were holding as political prisoners. Portelli gives the names of the Nazis' victims, at least fifteen to twenty in each chapter, so that by the end every individual has been named. The narrators' description of the victims makes us see them as individuals who once had a life.⁴⁶ The words of the oral histories become a memorial even more potent than a stone memorial.

Oral history may also correct false assumptions we make about history when we have no information from the people who lived it. In "Desperate Housewives' and the Domestic Environment in Post-War Britain: Individual Perspectives," Ali Haggett questions the assumption that housewives experienced emotional distress because of the banality of housework and the boredom of domesticity. The women interviewed attributed their anxiety and depression to problematic interpersonal relations and trauma in childhood. So, the causes of women's discontent were more deeply personal and more complicated than the facile explanation previously believed.⁴⁷

A very important contribution of oral history is the recorded stories themselves. Folklorist and professor of American studies, Barbara Allen says that storytelling is a "means of describing experience and expressing its meaning" and therefore it is naturally the way narrators answer the interviewers' questions.⁴⁸ By telling their personal stories as well as stories handed down, narrators "tell us something about the larger structures of historical consciousness within which individual narrators understand their own experiences."⁴⁹ They reveal a group's collective memory and indicate values embedded in the culture. Allen explains,

Although the stories are cast as personal narratives, they reflect a larger regional experience, the contours of which can be discerned in the repeated patterns of the individual narratives. This same principle, that stories express the significant categories of experience within a group, holds true not just for people in a particular region but for any group . . . —workers in a particular occupation, participants in an experience (war, disaster, immigration, etc.), families—whose members tell stories among themselves.⁵⁰

REMINISCENCE AND ORAL HISTORY

Until Erik Erikson's and Robert Butler's work became known, reminiscence was thought of as just an exercise in nostalgia. And it was an exercise relegated to the doddering. Erikson and Butler showed how remembering one's life is a natural and beneficial, even irresistible endeavor. And cognitive psychologists' research has revealed that people as young as two or three years have autobiographical memory. (Children remember at an even earlier age but participate in spoken reminiscence as soon as they can talk.)⁵¹ I ask my two-and-a-half-year-old grandson, "Did you go to the zoo yesterday? What did you see?" He thinks about it and replies, smiling, "Giraffe." Suddenly he is a man of the world, in his opinion (and mine, too).

His recall of the experience is empowering for him. He knows what he did: he knows who he is—a boy who saw a giraffe and remembers and is, therefore, in possession of this information. Uses of reminiscence, as researchers in cognitive psychology see the situation, are that a review of the past (1) reinforces a sense of stability of the self, (2) awakens ideas about possibilities of change, and (3) spurs ideas about social and cultural re-engagement.⁵² Paul Wink and Brian Schiff's longitudinal research at Berkeley on human development found that life review was related positively to "openness to experience, creativity, personal growth, and generativity."⁵³ Oral historian Alessandro Portelli expresses the aim of life review this way: "The tracing of the unity of one's self thus becomes one of the most powerful impulses behind the telling of one's life story."⁵⁴

By definition oral history evokes accounts of life experiences and therefore is conducive to reminiscing. More and more, oral history is being used as a way to encourage people who want to reminisce to do so. The two endeavors, oral history and reminiscence, are close: oral history aims at discovering testimony for understanding a historical time or a present era and for understanding individual lives in society; reminiscence aims at helping the narrator remember and understand his or her life.⁵⁵ Of course, not all individuals find it easy to do this kind of searching of the past and present.

Reminiscences, recorded as oral history, can be a means not only of providing information about our society but also of providing personal stories to be shared publicly in dramas. These dramatic presentations are different, however, from conventional theater because oral history enables the dramatist to use the very words of the people whose lives are portrayed. In reminiscence theater, creativity is not in the words—which remain unchanged and authentic—but in the ways the dramatist organizes the presentation, the director directs the actors, and the actors convey the meanings of the narrators' oral histories. To prepare for the role, actors also interview the narrators to get a sense of what the individual life was like. Sometimes the narrators themselves become the stage actors.⁵⁶

So, for schools, community meetings, arts council programs, radio and television, and street theater, these dramas using testimony from oral history recordings of reminiscence make it

possible for the audiences to be in direct contact with narrators' words. Pam Schweitzer, who has worked in British reminiscence theater for thirty years, describes the effect of the voices of the oral histories. She reminds us that each person has a regional accent and certain habitual expressions.

Consequently, when the original language of the interviews is spoken from the stage, the audience will be reminded that they are hearing the authentic voices of the story-tellers and that their stories are true, rather than inventions of the theatre company.⁵⁷

Such a use of oral history is now widespread in many countries. In the United States, where often the presentations concern local history, actors enact stories from their narrators' lives about known situations and well-known historical figures. This kind of community-based drama is not new in the United States, as Jan Cohen-Cruz points out in her book, *Local Acts: Community-Based Performance in the United States*.⁵⁸ It has long had a place in community life with such performances as skits in union halls, church basements, town squares and even prisons. For example, historian Alicia Rouverol, teaching an oral history workshop in a men's medium-security prison, agreed to a project suggested by her students: They wanted to make their recorded oral histories into a play that would be performed for "at-risk" young people. They progressed from the interviews to analysis to writing a script based on their own reminiscences, their own turning-points, their own life lessons.⁵⁹

We have followed a thread here about the many uses of oral history. Basically, we oral historians and our fellow oral history researchers in other disciplines document our times. We ask ourselves, Who will ever listen to these recorded testimonies? The answer is, of course: People who are interested in the subject will search for recordings that are relevant to them. French historian Pierre Nora gives us an eloquent answer:

We do not know what our descendants will need to know about ourselves in order to understand their own lives. And this inability to anticipate the future puts us under an obligation to stockpile, as it were, in a pious and somewhat indiscriminate fashion, any visible trace or material sign that might eventually testify to what we are or what we will have become.⁶⁰

THE USE OF NARRATIVE AS A RESEARCH STRATEGY

Early in my life, I realized that I learned from others' stories and that I liked to tell my own. As an adult, I looked back and decided this was a characteristic of my working-class culture in the American South. Growing up, I heard stories everywhere, at all times: at funerals, bus stops, grocery stores, the beauty shop and especially on my back porch. Reading studies about narrative, I learned that people tell stories in every culture, although form and purpose vary. Theorist Roland Barthes argued that narrative is always present in human groups.⁶¹ More and more, scholars recognize that storytelling is a compelling, universal endeavor. Psychologist Jerome Bruner declares, "The narrative gift is as distinctively human as our upright posture and our opposable thumb and forefinger."⁶²

The practice of asking questions and getting answers in the form of stories has been going on for centuries. Respect for narratives as research data has waxed and waned, however. It waxed in the 1920s up through World War II. It waned in the years after the war up to the late 1960s. Even in 1975 when psychologist William Runyan began to study life histories, he said, "A number of people reacted to these efforts at understanding life histories with responses ranging

from indifference to contempt.”⁶³ Only in the last thirty years has narrative as a research method become respected again by academicians. Psychologists Amia Lieblich, Rivka Tuval-Mashiach, and Tamar Zilber, in their book *Narrative Research: Reading, Analysis, and Interpretation*, describe what they see happening: “In the fields of psychology, gender studies, education, anthropology, sociology, linguistics, law, and history, narrative studies are flourishing as a means of understanding the personal identity, lifestyle, culture and historical world of the narrator.”⁶⁴

Why has this change of attitude come about? Possibly one influence is that now qualitative researchers question positivistic approaches, that is, quantification of data with objectivity and certainty about results as the goal. They seek other means of learning about humans, including narratives.⁶⁵

Another current influence that affects acceptance of narrative research is the postmodernist view that observations of human actions are shifting, never conclusive, always the product of the culture in which they are embedded. Since all observations are the product of the culture they purport to describe, information from narratives is as valid as any other evidence. In other words, narrative has the potential of revealing information about the culture at a certain time and place and social class and is approached critically, as one would approach any other kind of evidence.

Some postmodernists complain that narrative is a deceptive practice. Literary critic Robert Fulford says: “The world is not a place of beginnings and endings and middles, a place of coherence—and when narrative arranges the world in that way in order to tell a story and reach out to an audience, narrative lies.”⁶⁶ Actually, when we use stories to make sense of experience, and when we designate a beginning, middle, and end to an experience, what we say is true for us. On the other hand, the postmodernist assumption that truth is not necessarily to be found only in authoritative texts leads us to respect the individual account.

But even before the narrative form of research became acceptable, many oral historians and humanistic sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists sought in the individual life story a specificity and a richness of experience that general accounts did not offer. Anthropologist Ruth Behar says that life histories give us the information that general studies, supposed to be typical accounts, obscure:

Rather than looking at social and cultural systems solely as they impinge on a life, shape it, and turn it into an object, a life history should allow one to see how an actor makes culturally meaningful history, how history is produced in action and in the actor’s retrospective reflections on that action.⁶⁷

Even though scholars in the past regarded work based on narrative as the presentation of a simple story, many believe now that narratives are not simple and they are not innocent either because there is always an agenda. Bruner asks, “Why do we naturally portray ourselves through story, so naturally indeed that selfhood itself seems like a product of our own story making?” He argues that narrative expresses our deepest reasoning about ourselves and our experience. We pay attention to other personal accounts because narrative reveals “a way of thinking and imagining” that takes us into a life. Narrative is holistic: “It never tears asunder ideas and feelings.”⁶⁸

Narrative as a research tool is used by practitioners in many disciplines. Medical anthropologist Cheryl Mattingly, in her research concerning the use of narratives by occupational therapists, found that when they encouraged the patient to tell her or his life story, the patient could make sense of what was happening and fit the experience into a model, so that the story became part of a healing ritual.⁶⁹

Psychologist Carole Cain wanted to know how alcoholics change their self-identity so that they can begin to see themselves as nondrinkers. She studied storytelling among members of Alcoholics Anonymous.⁷⁰

Sociologist Ruth Finnegan studied life stories of people living in a British city to learn the multiplicity of experiences that could not be subsumed within the kind of general story such as social scientists often tell.⁷¹ Historian Virginia Yans-McLaughlin interviewed Italian and Jewish immigrants in New York City to find the stories that illustrate how culture (both ethnic and family) influences individuals' interpretations of experience.⁷² Historian Lu Ann Jones interviewed farm women and men in the South in the twentieth century to understand "broad economic and social changes in personal terms," the "interplay between structural changes and family and community life."⁷³

Former English professor, now Catholic Worker, Rosalie Riegle sought stories from people who had known Dorothy Day, the founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, to understand Day's impact on the people she worked with and to assess her legacy.⁷⁴ Of course, I have scratched only the surface with these examples.

Understanding a narrative requires a careful approach. Sociologist Catherine Riessman advises that narratives are "essential meaning-making structures," and therefore researchers must not break them up but "respect respondents' ways of constructing meaning and analyze how it is accomplished."⁷⁵ You will find more information on analysis and interpretation of narrative later in this book.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RECORDED LIFE REVIEW

Narrative is a strength of oral history, but consider also the limitations of the life story and how to use these limitations. Trevor Lummis, in *Listening to History*, observes that oral history testimony can give us a detailed account of wages paid in a factory to a specific level of worker but may be "silent on the question of profits." We can learn in the interview what families spent their money on, but not how profits were invested internationally. Lummis expresses this limitation concisely: "Given that so many dimensions of economic life occur at the level of institutional, national and international finance and of technology it is not surprising that those aspects are not recorded in most oral accounts."⁷⁶

The use of life reviews may result in a picture that is narrow, idiosyncratic, or ethnocentric. Studs Terkel's book *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* presents more than one hundred fifty testimonies of what it was like to live during the Depression years of 1929 and the 1930s.⁷⁷ The informants talked about how they survived during the Depression, rather than about the failure of capitalism to provide the necessities of life for most of the people. As historian Michael Frisch points out, the narrators saw this as a personal experience.⁷⁸

And yet there is the other side to this coin. In discussing the personal views presented in *Hard Times*, Frisch reminds us that taken together, the life histories reveal an important assumption in American culture: an individual can survive through hard work and ingenuity, no matter how bad the situation. He described the advantage of learning individuals' reflections on their personal experience of history: "Anyone who has wondered why the depression crises did not produce more focused critiques of American capitalism and culture, more sustained efforts to see fundamental structural change, will find more evidence in the interior of these testimonies than in any other source I know."⁷⁹

Research use of the in-depth interview is sometimes disparaged because it is thought to be idiosyncratic. In his article "What Is Social in Oral History?" Samuel Schragger stresses that often there are references to the larger community and to national and international events that the testimony is given in relationship to others. He gives this excerpt from an interview with immigrant Anna Marie Oslund: "I was born in eighteen ninety-one. And in eighteen ninety-two, the end of that summer—it was a late summer—my father went to America to find a better life for all of us. It was hard all over and he thought he'd try, he'd come."⁸⁰

The narrator indicates she will offer two points of view, her own and her father's. She also refers to conditions being "hard all over" and articulates the reality of the wider society. She relates the story as she has been told it. And this is a family story, one that is based on a view of the past at a certain time, one that sustains and guides the family in the present. It is assumed that it is in general terms like that of other families immigrating from the same place at roughly the same time.

Schragger sums up the use to which this personal narrative can be put: "A migration story can be a very personal account and at the same time an incarnation of the peopling of an era, the exigencies of pioneering, and the aspirations of all who risk relocating to find a better life."⁸¹ Like Barbara Allen, Schragger points out that individual testimony may reference the larger group and articulate a shared reality. Along similar lines, a scholar in public administration Camilla Stivers insists that our own stories are always "filled with the voices of others—voices by means of which we explicate not only ourselves but the world as well."⁸²

By using the approach of grounded theory—the examination of a large sample of recorded life histories, the multiplicity of incidents that makes "thick description" possible—we can make generalizations about a society. Paul Thompson and Thea Vigne did exactly this in their study of British society at the turn of the twentieth century: their project resulted in the recorded life histories of more than nine hundred narrators who represented contemporary occupational categories.⁸³ They used these interviews inductively to arrive at an understanding of several important aspects of Edwardian society.

A second limitation—one related to the ability to generalize from the testimonies—lies in the selectivity of narrators: it is the articulate who come forward to be participants. In interviewing clerical workers for a project in Rhode Island, my fellow researchers and I found that our narrators were feisty, articulate, witty, sociable women. They were the ones who had volunteered to talk.⁸⁴ Would we have gotten a different picture if those who were not enthusiastic about talking had been represented in the collection of taped life reviews? We

went on the assumption that the articulate spoke for the others, but I wish I had been more assiduous in seeking non-volunteers and more persuasive when I found them. Probably, most interviewing projects are selective in that the shy or inarticulate individual—or the person valuing privacy—does not come forward.

Furthermore, as a historian interviewing the generation of mill workers who began work as children in a new North Carolina cotton mill at the beginning of the twentieth century, I listened to my narrators refer to those who died young. My sample was biased in the direction of the healthiest simply because survivors could talk to me. If this had been a study of safety conditions (they were nonexistent) in the mill, this selectivity of narrators would have seriously limited interviewing evidence and biased the conclusion.

A third limitation is the fact that the in-depth life review presents retrospective evidence. But before I discuss this problem, consider the questions always asked of a written document no matter how much time has elapsed: What motive does the witness have for writing this? For whom is this document intended? How close was this witness to the event itself? How informed is this witness about the event observed? What prior assumptions did the witness bring to the observation? What kinds of details have been omitted?

These are questions to be asked of any primary source, including an oral history. Traditionally trained historians see the oral history document as especially faulty because, in addition to the above questions, there is the question of how much the narrator slanted the story to make it interesting or at least acceptable to the interviewer. This is a valid question. But slanting the story to make it acceptable to the receiver occurs even with the diary writer: even here the individual who writes only for himself—or herself—tries to protect the ego. People who write their accounts without an interviewer often make themselves heroes of the stories, justifying their actions to themselves, as they reflect on their experiences. Motivation for describing oneself in the best light is always there, no matter what the form of expression. The minute taker at a board meeting writes with a future reader in mind. The journalist's account for the morning paper is slanted to speak to imagined readers. And letter writers always have in mind their correspondents' interests.

On the other hand, like other interviewers, I have found that people tend with the passage of time to be more, rather than less, candid. When a career is in progress, there is much to lose by an untoward admission. Near the end of a life, there is a need to look at things as honestly as possible to make sense of experiences over a lifetime: this need to understand what happened strongly competes with the need to make oneself look good.

As for deliberate omissions, this is as likely to happen with official documents such as government press releases or personal documents such as letters, as with oral histories. Perhaps the omissions are less likely with oral histories if the interviewer gently probes and the narrator is willing to elaborate.

And now to the issue of retrospective evidence. This is especially problematic for historians, who are the most concerned about the past and who evaluate the reliability of evidence according to the amount of time that elapses between the event and its written description. A journal entry on the day the event occurred is considered more reliable than the event

remembered twenty years later and recounted in a memoir. Actually, research indicates that people forget more about a specific event in the first hour after it happens than during any other time and that much forgetting continues to go on nine hours afterward; in other words, more is forgotten the first day than in the succeeding weeks, months, and years.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, although much has been forgotten a couple of hours later when the diarist writes, more has been forgotten after twenty years when the diarist records a life story.

All of us who have used the in-depth interview in research realize that ability to recall depends on the individual's health, on interest in the topic under consideration, on the way the question is asked, on the degree of pain (or pleasure) required to dredge the topic up, and on the willingness of the narrator to participate in the interview in a helpful way. We notice that memories of childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood may be more easily recalled than those from middle and late years. Memory researchers have found that if the event or situation was significant for the individual, it will likely be remembered in some detail, especially if its associated feelings were intense. However, the narrator's interpretation may reflect current circumstances and needs. That old cliché about memory playing tricks has some truth to it. (The next chapter is focused on an exploration of studies on memory relevant to oral history research.)

Given the situation that human memory is selective and sometimes faulty in what is remembered, traditionally scholars followed two aspects of a critical approach to the oral history: consistency in the testimony (or reliability) and accuracy in relating factual information (or validity). Accuracy (the degree of conformity with other accounts) can be checked by consulting other sources and comparing accounts.⁸⁶

Consistency within the testimony can be easily checked, and questions about inconsistency pursued. However, this process is more complicated than it seems. In contemporary times, if lawyers or judges find consistency in an account, they immediately suspect its veracity. If the person is giving an account of something he witnessed, he can't help but overlook details in one account that he remembers in another.

After subjecting the oral history to such scrutiny, we may see that it can indeed offer information about an event that is consistent within the document and with other accounts. In other words, social scientists recognize that some "facts" have a shared reality with "facts" from other sources and multiple means of verifying their facticity.⁸⁷ And everyone views some facts as more reliable than others, and so it seems that there are degrees of trust.

By accumulating sources of information and comparing them, we can arrive at an approximate understanding of what happened or is happening and hold this information with some certainty. But there is never absolute certainty about any event, about any fact, no matter what sources are used. No single source or combination of them can ever give a picture of the total complexity of the reality. We cannot reconstruct a past event, no matter how recent, in its entirety.

Another consideration is that the interpretation of the evidence depends on the interpreter. If we place kinds of evidence on a continuum, starting with the least mediation and ending with the most, such artifacts as vases, ditches in the land, tombs, have had the least "mediation." A

personal account has the most. A vase is what the researcher makes of it: a human being's past experience is what he or she makes of it before the researcher even begins to interpret it.

We can, however, base a tentative conclusion on what a critical review of the evidence indicates. R. G. Collingwood describes this process: "For historical thinking means nothing else than interpreting all the available evidence with the maximum degree of critical skill."⁸⁸ This implies there is always the possibility that new evidence may appear, that new technology to evaluate the evidence may be developed, that new skills will be learned. Although Collingwood was referring to historical research, interpreting the available evidence with critical skill is applicable to any research that social scientists carry out.

And yet, is it not the meaning attributed to the facts that makes them significant or not? After all, history—or society—does not exist outside human consciousness. History is what the people who lived it make of it and what the others who observe the participants or listen to them or study their records make of it. And present society is what we make of it. Sociologist W. I. Thomas discusses "definition of the situation," arguing, "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences."⁸⁹

SPECIAL STRENGTHS OF ORAL HISTORY

So, what if the narrator is dead wrong about a number, a date, or an event? The factual information may be incorrect, but look more closely at the document to discover what significance the discrepancy may reveal. Oral historian Alessandro Portelli reminds us that "untrue" statements may be psychologically "true" and that errors in fact may be more revealing than factually accurate accounts. He insists that the "importance of oral testimony may often lie not in its adherence to facts but rather in its divergence from them, where imagination, symbolism, desire break in."⁹⁰

To illustrate this, Portelli shows how narrators might get dates incorrect but hold steadfastly to an account of a historical event that fits their view of history. For example, over half of the workers interviewed in the Italian industrial town of Terni, in telling the story of their postwar strikes, place the killing of a worker by the police in 1953 rather than, as it really happened, in 1949; they also shift it from one context to another (from a peace demonstration to the urban guerrilla struggle that followed mass layoffs at the local steelworks). This testimony is useful even though incorrect about the actual chronology and context. These factual matters, as well as dates, are easy to check. But discrepancy forces us to rearrange our interpretation of events in order to recognize the collective processes of symbolization and mythmaking in the Terni working class. They see those years as one uninterrupted struggle expressed by a unifying symbol, the dead comrade, rather than as a succession of separate events.⁹¹

Portelli asked the question, Why is there discrepancy between dates recorded elsewhere and dates given in the oral histories? The researcher can use discrepancy to learn something important by asking about the narrator's account: How does he construct this view? Where do his concepts come from? Why does he build this persona and not another? What are the consequences for this individual?

Closely related to this symbolization is the use of oral history to discover habitual thinking (often below the level of conscious thinking), which comes from the evolving culture in which

individuals live. Although the term *culture* has differing shades of meaning according to its interpreter, many students of human society would accept the definition given by Charles Stephenson that culture is “a reality of shared values, common patterns of thought, behavior, and association.”⁹² Ethnographer Clifford Geertz says: “Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs.”⁹³

French historian Jacques Le Goff explains the concept this way: “Automatic gestures, spontaneous words, which seem to lack any origins and to be the fruits of improvisation and reflex, in fact possess deep roots in the long reverberation of systems of thought.”⁹⁴ The example he gives is from medieval history but is definitely applicable to the work of the scholar engaged in the search for an understanding of contemporary society. Pope Gregory the Great, in his *Dialogues* (written between 590 and 600), recounts the story of a monk who, on his deathbed, confessed to have kept for himself three gold coins. Keeping material possessions to oneself was against the rules of the order. Pope Gregory refused to let the man have the last rites, insisted on neglect of the dying man, and after the culprit’s death, punished him still again by having his body thrown on the garbage heap.

His stated reason was that he wanted to show other monks they must adhere to the order’s rules, but this was definitely a negation of Christian ideology, which would have been to forgive. Le Goff concludes, “The barbarian custom of physical punishment (brought by the Goths or a throwback to some psychic depths?) proves stronger than the monastic rule.”⁹⁵

In the recounting of events, the deeper layers of our thinking may be revealed, indicating the centuries-long development of the culture in which we have our being. For this, oral history testimony is a research method par excellence. We cannot drag Pope Gregory from his tomb, prop him up, and ask, “What were you thinking when you ordered that monk thrown in the garbage?” But we can ask a living witness.

CONCLUSION

Oral history testimony is inevitably subjective: its subjectivity is at once inescapable and crucial to an understanding of the meanings we give our past and present. To reveal the meanings of lived experience is the great task of qualitative research and specifically oral history interviews. The in-depth interview offers the benefit of seeing in its full complexity the world of another. And in collating in-depth interviews and using the insights to be gained from them as well as different kinds of information from other kinds of records, we can come to some understanding of the process by which we got to be the way we are.

RECOMMENDED READING

HEADS UP: Each chapter has a list of recommended readings, but be aware that these lists are incomplete. It would be impossible to list all of the good works on oral history, this rich field, without turning this book into a long bibliography. You will find each recommended article or book leads to still other sources. The few lines accompanying each entry can give you a hint about the work but never do it justice.

Discussions on Research Methods

- Denzin, Norman K. *Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices for the 21st Century*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997. See especially chapter 9, “The Sixth Moment,” pp. 250–89, in which Denzin discusses postmodernism’s influence on views of the researcher-researched relationship. He expresses strong arguments against positivism.
- . *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989. This book presents a discussion of qualitative methods that is focused on participant observation; there is information useful not only to the interviewer in the field of sociology but in other fields as well. Sociologists might also want to consult Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *Landscape of Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003) and Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *Turning Points in Qualitative Research* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2003).
- Douglas, Jack D. *Investigative Social Research*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1976. This is a general guide to fieldwork research; it presents a comparison of quantitative and qualitative methods in the introduction. Although it is not focused exclusively on the in-depth interview, it offers discussion on such concerns as self-deception and biases.
- Gardini, Gian Luca. “In Defense of Oral History: Evidence from the Mercosur Case.” *Journal of Politics in Latin America* 1 (2012): 107–33. Gardini reveals cases where oral history research is indispensable: “when written primary sources are not readily available; second, when an investigation targets complex and secret high-level negotiations; and third, when the main research concern is the human agent’s perspective and ideational factors.” He illustrates this by means of specific political cases he has been involved in or observed closely.
- Glaser, Barney, and Anselm Strauss. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1967. This is the original source for discussions about grounded theory. An early statement can be found in their article “The Discovery of Substantive Theory: A Basic Strategy Underlying Qualitative Research,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 8, no. 6 (February 1965): 5–12.
- Gubrium, Jaber F., James A. Holstein, Amir B. Marvasti, and Karyn D. McKinney. *The Sage Handbook of Interview Research: The Complexity of the Craft*. 2nd Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2012. A valuable resource of over 600 pages. Look up the specific topic you need; you will find a lucid brief essay by an authoritative scholar as well as a brief bibliography.
- Jensen, Richard. “Oral History, Quantification and the New Social History.” *Oral History Review* 9 (1981): 13–25. The author states that the use of a questionnaire offers the advantage of providing systematic answers to identical questions, but it gives up the richness of narrative detail offered by the in-depth interview.
- Merriam, Sharan B. *Case Study Research in Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998. A lucid treatise, slanted toward scholars in education but containing information on using the in-depth interview that is applicable to other disciplines.
- Price, Richard. *Ethnographic History, Caribbean Pasts*. Working Papers no. 9, Department of Spanish and Portuguese, University of Maryland, College Park, 1990. Insightful brief essay—and witty.
- Sharpless, Rebecca. “The Numbers Game: Oral History Compared with Quantitative Methodology.” *International Journal of Oral History* 7, no. 2 (June 1986): 93–108. The author suggests ways in which oral history and a testing instrument for quantification can be used together, and she compares intrusion of the interviewer in both methods.

General Works on Oral History

- Abrams, Lynn. *Oral History Theory*. A book on theory that is so clear in writing style, so illuminating in its examples, so encompassing in knowledge of oral history texts that you will find it a useful resource. (In some subjects I take a different approach. For example, in a study of memory I turn to psychologists’ findings more often than Abrams, but in this textbook on theory, Abrams emphasizes other informative studies.)
- Allen, Barbara, and W. Lynwood Montell. *From Memory to History: Using Oral Sources in Local Historical Research*. Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History, 1981. See this book for discussions of the combined use of history and folklore and for the evaluation of an oral history.
- Charlton, Thomas, Lois E. Myers, and Rebecca Sharpless, eds. *Thinking about Oral History: Theories and Applications*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2008. Major issues are discussed, but also included are special articles on oral history projects, such as Kim Lacy Rogers, “Aging, the Life Course, and Oral History: African American Narratives of Struggle, Social Change, and Decline.”
- Dunaway, David K., and Willa K. Baum, eds. *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 1996. This collection of articles from journals covers many aspects of oral history research; each article provides a quick overview of specific topics and an accompanying bibliography.
- Friedlander, Peter. Introduction to *The Emergence of a UAW Local, 1936–1939: A Study in Class and Culture*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973. The author discusses the ways that narrators construct the narrative and, therefore, a view of history. The essay offers a convincing example of the benefits of repeated in-depth interviews with the same narrator.
- Grele, Ronald, ed. *Envelopes of Sound: Six Practitioners Discuss the Method, Theory and Practice of Oral History and Oral Testimony*. 2nd ed. Chicago: Precedent Publishing, 1992. These articles contain numerous insights, such as why stories

- are revealing, how attitude affects memory, and how oral history research affects the interviewer.
- Henige, David. *Oral Historiography*. London: Longman, 1982. This is an especially helpful guide for researchers going into field research in non-Western cultures.
- Lummis, Trevor. *Listening to History: The Authenticity of Oral Evidence*. London: Hutchinson, 1987. See especially the chapters on assessing interviews and on memory and theory.
- Perks, Robert, and Alistair Thompson, eds. *The Oral History Reader*. London: Routledge, 2014. Collection of outstanding articles under headings, such as: “Critical Developments,” “Interviewing,” “Advocacy and Empowerment,” “Interpreting Memories,” and “Making Histories.”
- Portelli, Alessandro. *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991. This is a collection of journal articles (several of which I have mentioned singly) that have helped to define the purposes of oral history. Beautifully written, fascinating.
- Ritchie, Donald, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Very useful collection of articles by prominent practitioners in the field of oral history.
- Thompson, Paul. *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. This is an insightful account of the uses of oral history by a veteran interviewer.
- Thomson, Alistair. “Four Paradigm Transformations in Oral History.” *The Oral History Review* 34, no. 1 (2007): 49–71. This is a concise and informative overview of major developments in oral history from the late 1970s to the present decade. Thomson traces four major influences: (1) ascendancy of personal testimony in political and legal practices; (2) increasing use of interdisciplinary approaches to interviewing and interpretation; (3) increasing focus on the relationship between history and memory; and (4) growing internationalism of oral history. The four paradigms are the emphasis on memory as a source for history, the influence of post-positivist approaches, the changing role of the oral historian as interviewer and analyst, and the digital revolution.
- Trimble, Charles E., Barbara Sommer, Mary Kay Quinlan. *American Indian Oral History Manual: Making Many Voices Heard*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2008. Authors give information about First Nation people not found in any other manual. Very useful, especially in advising on planning projects so that they meet the needs and protocols of particular tribal cultures.

Oral History and Folklore

- Davis, Susan G. “Review Essay: Storytelling Rights.” *Oral History Review* 16, no. 2 (Fall 1988): 109–15. This article briefly discusses how oral history and folklore are different but can be used together.
- Dorson, Richard. “The Oral Historian and the Folklorist.” In *Selections of the Fifth and Sixth National Colloquia on Oral History*. New York: Oral History Association, 1972. This is a treatment of folklore’s distinguishing characteristics and its differences from oral history. See also his book *American Folklore and the Historian* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971).
- Ives, Edward D. *The Tape-Recorded Interview: A Manual for Fieldworkers in Folklore and Oral History*. 2nd ed. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995. A classic study, with useful information delivered with a sense of humor. Ives talks about other subjects as well as oral history, such as recording music, using photographs, and carrying out interviews with groups.
- Montell, William Lynwood. *The Saga of Coe Ridge: A Study in Oral History*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1970. See the preface for a discussion of the ways that historians can use folklore. Montell argues that a folk tradition is itself a historical fact.
- Schneider, William. *So They Understand: Cultural Issues in Oral History*. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2002. Schneider, an anthropologist and folklorist, divides his book into three main parts: “How Stories Work,” “Types of Stories,” and “Issues Raised by Stories.” Chapter 4, “Sorting Out Oral Tradition and Oral History,” pp. 53–66, gives a folklorist’s point of view. He raises important questions about the way oral history is used in chapter 8, “Life Histories: The Constructed Genre,” pp. 109–21. See also Schneider, William, ed. *Living with Stories: Telling, Retelling, and Remembering*. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2008.

Works on the Interviewer—Narrator Relationship and Subjectivity in Research

- Anderson, Kathryn, Susan Armitage, Dana Jack, and Judith Wittner. “Beginning Where We Are: Feminist Methodology in Oral History.” *Oral History Review* 15 (Spring 1987): 103–27. This is a discussion by a psychologist, sociologist, and two historians about the influence of “particular and limited interests, perspectives, and experience of white males” on research—and much more.
- Cottle, Thomas. “The Life Study: On Mutual Recognition and the Subjective Inquiry.” *Urban Life and Culture* 2, no. 3 (October 1973): 344–60. The author reflects on the “new selves” of researchers emerging because of the research.

- Daniels, Arlene. "Self-Deception and Self-Discovery in Field Work." *Qualitative Sociology* 6, no. 3 (1983): 195–214. This is a candid, searching account of the author's behavior as an interviewer.
- Gluck, Sherna Berger, and Daphne Patai. *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*. New York: Routledge, 1991. This collection of articles discusses listening, using words, relating to narrators, looking critically at one's work, and interviewing Third World women.
- Kleinman, Sherryl. "Field-Workers' Feelings: What We Feel, Who We Are, How We Analyze." In *Experiencing Fieldwork: An Inside View of Qualitative Research*, ed. William B. Shaffir and Robert A. Stebbins. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1991. This is a sociologist's exploration of how the field researcher's feelings affect a study and how failure to recognize feelings affects a study.
- Lebeaux, Richard. "Thoreau's Lives, Lebeaux's Lives." In *Introspection in Biography: The Biographer's Quest for Self-Awareness*, ed. Samuel H. Baron and Carl Pletsch. Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press, 1985. The entire collection is interesting in the questions it raises about the effects on the researcher of studying an individual life.
- Patai, Daphne. *Brazilian Women Speak*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988. In her discussion of methodology, the author explores her feelings about research among women in Brazil, pointing out how her intervention affected both researcher and the researched.
- Yow, Valerie R. "Do I Like Them Too Much? Effects of the Oral History Interview on the Interviewer and Vice-Versa." *Oral History Review* 24, no. 1 (Summer 1997): 55–79. This article traces changes in the social sciences regarding the recognition and use of subjectivity in research, especially the effects of the interviewing on the interviewer.

Studies on the Philosophy of History and on Ethnography

- Clifford, James. "Introduction: Partial Truths." In *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George Marcus, 1–26. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986. This is a perceptive and influential essay on the "webs" of culture.
- Collingwood, R. G. *Autobiography*. London: Oxford University Press, 1939. This uncommon autobiography presents the intellectual journey taken by an important theorist of historical research.
- . *Essays in the Philosophy of History*, ed. William Debbins. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965. See especially "The Limits of Historical Knowledge" and "The Philosophy of History."
- Geertz, Clifford. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture." In *The Interpretation of Culture*, 3–30. New York: Basic Books, 1973. This is an early, provocative discussion of the use of "thick description" in researching a culture.
- Hay, Cynthia. "What Is Sociological History?" In *Interpreting the Past, Understanding the Present*, ed. Stephen Kendrick and Pat Straw, 20–37. New York: St. Martin's, 1990. Hay presents a brief essay on the relationship of history to the social sciences of sociology and anthropology.
- Le Goff, Jacques, and Pierre Nora. *Constructing the Past: Essays in Historical Methodology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. See especially the chapter "Mentalities: A History of Ambiguities" by Le Goff.
- Rosaldo, Renato. *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989. In this provocative study of ethnographic research, the author discusses his own fieldwork to illustrate the importance of acknowledging and using one's own feelings and assumptions in the process of researching and analyzing.

Studies on the Use of Narrative in Research

- Finnegan, Ruth. *Tales of the City: A Study of Narrative and Urban Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. See especially the first chapter for an illuminating definition of story. In subsequent chapters, the author presents oral histories and analyzes them. She shows the way narrative heightens "our understanding not only of urban theory but of our own lives and culture" (p. 3).
- Fulford, Robert. *The Triumph of Narrative: Storytelling in the Age of Mass Culture*. New York: Broadway Books, 2000. Fulford, described as a "cultural journalist," sets out to critique master narratives like Toynbee's, works that feature the "unreliable narrator," model literary narratives like those of Sir Walter Scott, and news programs and films as takeoffs of the narratives of Western culture.
- Gottschall, J. *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2012. An entertaining book-length essay on how we humans use narrative.
- Josselson, Ruthellen, and Amia Lieblich. "Fettering the Mind in the Name of Science." *American Psychologist* 51, no. 6 (1996): 651–52. Authors argue that psychology is between paradigms as logical, positivistic research gives way to narrative-based psychology.
- , eds. *The Narrative Study of Lives*. Vol. 5. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997. The variety of articles attests to the range of uses of narrative in research.

- Kenyon, Gary M., and William L. Randall. *Restorying Our Lives: Personal Growth through Autobiographical Reflection*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997. Authors argue that we tell stories because “our thoughts, feelings, and actions, even our personal identity, can thus be understood as a story.” (16). In other words, telling stories enables us to make sense of these and weave them into their place in our lives.
- Mattingly, Cheryl. *Healing Dramas and Clinical Plots: The Narrative Structure of Experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. This is a beautifully written account of Mattingly’s ethnographic research among occupational therapists in a large Boston hospital, but the discussion of narrative gives it universal application. Mattingly’s theme is this: “The need to narrate the strange experience of illness is part of the very human need to be understood by others, to be in communication even if from the margins” (p. 1).
- McAdams, Dan. *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self*. New York: William Morrow, 1993. Author points out that we all compose myths about ourselves, and these myths express our wishes about how we conduct ourselves in the world.
- Montalbano-Phelps, Lori L. *Taking Narrative Risk: The Empowerment of Abuse Survivors*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2004. With these narratives of abuse survivors, the author assesses the relationship between narration and the empowerment of the narrator.
- Peacock, James, and Dorothy Holland. “The Narrative Self: Life Stories in Process.” *Ethos* 21 (1993): 367–83. This review article treats various approaches to using life histories, stressing the importance of narratives as conveying the dynamic, rather than static, view of a life. The authors critique ways to interpret the life history, arguing that each discipline’s approach is limited and that a more creative, interdisciplinary approach is needed.
- Stivers, Camilla. “Reflections on the Role of Personal Narrative in Social Science. Review.” *Signs* 2 (Winter 1993): 408–25. Stivers begins by showing how narrative was regarded in the positivistic decades of social science. She then works to point out how superior postmodernism is, but tempers the discussion. Interesting.
- Watson, Lawrence, and Maria-Barbara Watson-Franke. *Interpreting Life Histories: An Anthropological Inquiry*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1985. An informative, thought-provoking book, now a classic. Read chapter 1 for a historical survey of the use of life history research by anthropologists.

Journals Devoted to Oral History

- Historia antropologia y fuentes orales*. Edited by Mercedes Vilanova I. Ribas. Universitat de Barcelona. Access information about this journal on the web at www.hayfo.com/credits.html.
- Oral History Association of Australia Journal*. Published by the State Library of New South Wales, Sydney. One issue per year.
- Oral History Forum d’histoire orale*. (Previously the Canadian Oral History Forum/Journal.) Published with assistance from Brescia University College of London, Ontario. One issue per year.
- Oral History: Journal of the Oral History Society*. University of Essex. United Kingdom. Two issues per year.
- Oral History Review*. Published by the Oral History Association. Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia. Two issues per year.

And major journals that have sections devoted to oral history:

- Journal of American History*. Bloomington, Indiana: Mississippi Valley Historical Association. Four issues annually; see September issues for oral history section.

Bibliographies of Publications in Oral History and Oral History Collections

- Annotated Bibliography of Oral History in Canada: 1980–2012*. Kristine R. Lewellyn and Dana Nowak, eds. Published annually by the Canadian Oral History Association in the journal *Oral History Forum d’histoire orale*. This annotated bibliography is based on extensive searches in the social sciences and humanities data bases for publications with a focus on Canadian subjects.
- Cook, Pat, ed. *Oral History Guide: Bibliographic Listing of the Memoirs in the Micropublished Collections*. Sanford, NC: New York Times Oral History Program and Microfilm Corporation of America, 1983. See the review by Grele, Ronald J. “On Using Oral History Collections: An Introduction.” *Journal of American History* 74 (September 1987): 570–78.
- Directory of British Oral History Collections*. Vol. 1. The Oral History Society, 1981. (There never was a volume 2.)
- The Directory of Recorded Sound Resources in the UK* is an overview of oral history in Britain in 1990 (out of date now). Go to <http://www.ohs.org.uk/collections.php> to see regional surveys. Robert Perks reports that JSTOR is now a great resource for finding oral histories in localities or on particular topics.
- Ekrişh, A. H. *Oral History and Oral Tradition: A Selective Bibliography*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh School of Library Science, 1985.

- Havlice, Patricia Pate, ed. *Oral History: A Reference Guide and Annotated Bibliography*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland Publishing Company, 1985. This volume includes books, articles, and dissertations on oral history published from 1950 to late 1983. Annotations give brief summaries of content; entries are arranged alphabetically by author.
- Meckler, Alan M., and Ruth McMullins, eds. *Oral History Collections*. New York: R. R. Bowker Company, 1975. Find by name and subject. Detailed information in each entry.
- National Catalog of Manuscript Collections*. U.S. government publication, last published in 1993. Citations give you the number that will enable you to locate each description. For example, looking at “oral history” in the index, you see 91-365, which sends you to volume 1991, entry number 365, “Eleanor Roosevelt oral history transcriptions.”
- Oral History Index: An International Directory of Oral History Interviews*. Ellen S. Wasserman, ed. Westport, CT: Meckler Publishing Company, 1990. The first section lists in alphabetical order the narrator’s name and supplies a code for locating the tapes. The second section lists the codes and directs you to the oral history’s location. This can only be a partial listing because many of the oral history archives queried did not reply. There is no subject index. (This company has been sold, and so a succeeding volume is unlikely to appear in this form.) Reviewed by Charles C. Hay III in *The American Archivist* 54, no. 2 (Spring 1991): 313–14.
- Perks, Robert. *Oral History: An Annotated Bibliography*. London: British Library National Sound Archives, 1990. Author does well with a task made difficult by the immense amount of sources. He focuses on Great Britain and includes both published works and references to archives containing interviews.
- Smith, Allan, ed. *Directory of Oral History Collections*. Phoenix: Oryx Press, 1988. More a directory of institutions that hold oral history collections than a directory of individual collections, according to the review by William Moss in the *Oral History Review* (Fall 1988): 173–74.

Please note: None of these can be inclusive because many collections are not reported to editors. However, continue to search, seeking, for example, regional directories like *Oral History Collections in the Southwest Region: A Directory and Subject Guide*, edited by Cathryn A. Gallacher (Los Angeles: Southwest Oral History Association, 1986).

Internet Resources: Indexes and Directories

- Oral History Directory*. Internet resource offered by Alexander Street Press at www.alexanderstreet2.com/oralhist/. Free resource that gives details of approximately 570 oral history collections in English.
- Oral History Online*. Internet resource offered by Alexander Street Press at www.alexanderstreet.com/products/orhi.htm. The press claims to index all important oral history collections in English available on the web or in archives. Data base is updated yearly. Annual subscription fee required.
- Oral History Forum d’histoire orale*. www.oralhistoryforum.ca/index.php/ohf
- Oral History List Service*. www.h-net.org/~oralhist/. Free, user friendly. See especially for discussions of current issues and bibliography. Find discussion log for past discussions. (This replaces H-oralhist as of March 2014.)
- Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN)*. See RLG Union Catalog, Recordings. This is an international, not-for-profit organization that serves libraries, archives, and museums. It shows location of collections of oral histories. There is a hefty fee for membership—it is not intended for individuals—so use this source in one of these institutions.
- Oral History in a Digital Age, a website (<http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu>), is one source for brief articles on various aspects of oral history practice, especially collecting, curating, and disseminating oral history interviews.

NOTES

1. Judith Stacey, “Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?” in *Women’s Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, ed. Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, 111–19 (New York: Routledge, 1991), see p. 115.
2. I am indebted to Jane Adams for dialogue with me on this subject; Jane Adams, communication to author, June 22, 1993. And I draw from Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 19–21, 50.
3. Phrase which sums up the underlying theme in Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990). See also an issue of the *Oral History Review* (30, no. 1 [winter, spring 2003]: 27–110) in which oral historians describe their projects in which this approach was used. Michael Frisch comments on pages 111–13. See also in the same issue, Linda Shopes’s commentary, “Sharing Authority,” 103–10.
4. Clifford Geertz, “History and Anthropology,” in *Historical Methods in the Social Sciences*, Volume 1, *Historical Social Science: Presuppositions and Prescriptions*, ed. John A. Hall and Joseph M. Bryant, 205–19 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005), see p. 208.
5. Louis Starr, “Oral History,” in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, ed. David Dunaway and Willa K. Baum, 3–26 (Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History, 1996), see pp. 10–12.

6. Starr, "Oral History."
7. Charles Morrissey, "Why Call It Oral History? Searching for Early Usage of a Generic Term," *Oral History Review* 8 (1980): 20–48, see p. 35.
8. Morrissey, "Why Call It Oral History?" 35.
9. James Bennett, "Human Values in Oral History," *Oral History Review* 11 (1983): 1–15, see p. 14.
10. Sharan Merriam, *Case Study Research in Education: A Qualitative Approach* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1988), 6–7.
11. Merriam, *Case Study Research in Education*, 16.
12. Paul Thompson, *The Edwardians: The Remaking of British Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), 6.
13. Trevor Lummis, *Listening to History: The Authenticity of Oral Evidence* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), 75.
14. Arlene Daniels, "Self-Deception and Self-Discovery in Field Work," *Qualitative Sociology* 6, no. 3 (1983): 195–214, see p. 197.
15. David Boder, *I Did Not Interview the Dead* (Champlain: University of Illinois Press, 1949).
16. Alan Rosen, *The Wonder of Their Voices: The 1946 Holocaust Interviews of David Broder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 78.
17. Mary Maynard, "Methods, Practice and Epistemology: The Debate about Feminism and Research," in *Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective*, ed. Mary Maynard and June Purvis, 10–26 (London: Taylor and Francis, 1994), see p. 13.
18. Jack D. Douglas, *Investigative Social Research* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1976), 25.
19. Fern Ingersoll and Jasper Ingersoll, "Both a Borrower and a Lender Be: Ethnography, Oral History, and Grounded Theory," *Oral History Review* 15 (Spring 1987): 81–102, see p. 83.
20. Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, "The Discovery of Substantive Theory: A Basic Strategy Underlying Qualitative Research," *American Behavioral Scientist* 8, no. 6 (February 1965): 5–12.
21. Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Culture*, 3–30 (New York: Basic Books, 1973), see also a later discussion in Geertz's book, pp. 203–5.
22. Leonard Schatzman and Anselm L. Strauss, *Field Research: Strategies for a Natural Sociology* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 19.
23. Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis* (London: Sage, 2006), 4–12.
24. R. G. Collingwood, "The Philosophy of History," in *Essays in the Philosophy of History*, ed. William Debbins, 121–39 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), see p. 137.
25. See, for example, Dennis Smith, "Social History and Sociology—More Than Just Good Friends," *Sociological Review* 30, no. 2 (1982): 286–308.
26. Michael Frisch, "Working-Class Public History in the Context of Deindustrialism, Dilemmas of Authority and the Possibilities of Dialogue," *Labour/LeTravail* 51 (Spring 2003): 153–64, see p.4
27. Parita Mukta, "The Attrition of Memories: Ethics, Morality and Futures," *Oral History* 34 (Spring 2006): 61–68.
28. Seventh Conference of the International Auto/Biography Association, The Centre for Life History and Life Writing, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK, 2010.
29. Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Patient Care: A History of Butler Hospital* (Providence, RI: Butler Hospital, 1994), see chapter 2, "A New Kind of Hospital."
30. Lummis, *Listening to History*, 43.
31. Bill Williams, "The Jewish Immigrant in Manchester: The Contribution of Oral History," *Oral History* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 43.
32. Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 4.
33. Lummis, *Listening to History*, 150.
34. Paul Thompson, introduction to *Our Common History: The Transformation of Europe*, ed. Paul Thompson and Natasha Burchardt (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1982), 11.
35. Valerie Raleigh Yow (listed as Valerie Quinney), "Childhood in a Southern Mill Village," *International Journal of Oral History* 3, no. 3 (November 1982): 167–92, see p. 171.
36. Valerie Raleigh Yow, *The History of Hera: A Woman's Art Cooperative, 1974–1989* (Wakefield, RI: Hera Educational Foundation, 1989), 8–9.
37. Yow, *History of Hera*, 19.
38. Yow, *History of Hera*.
39. Yow, "Childhood in a Southern Mill Village," 184.
40. Lummis, *Listening to History*, 110.

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