



REFLEXIVE INTERVIEWING

EPIC Talk
Zeynep Arsel

AGENDA



What is a
reflexive
interview?



Why do we do
reflexive
interviews?



How can we do
reflexive
interviews?



Examples



Tips



Questions



A reflexive interpersonal
conversation



Active and iterative research
process

A REFLEXIVE INTERVIEW

REFLEXIVITY

Understanding own position as a researcher

- Understanding own assumptions, biases, shortcomings, and value-positions
- Choice of words
- Framing of research question
- Are you the right person to do the interview?

Being reflexive about what is being said

- People do not hold the answer to your particular question, they need to construct it with you
- Don't take what has been seen at face value
- Don't take what you interpret at face value
- Continuously "hearing"

SEE YOURSELF AS A REFLEXIVE RESEARCH INSTRUMENT



Interviewer as a research tool



The interview protocol as an ever evolving document



Acknowledge the preconceptions, biases and assumptions you are bringing to the field

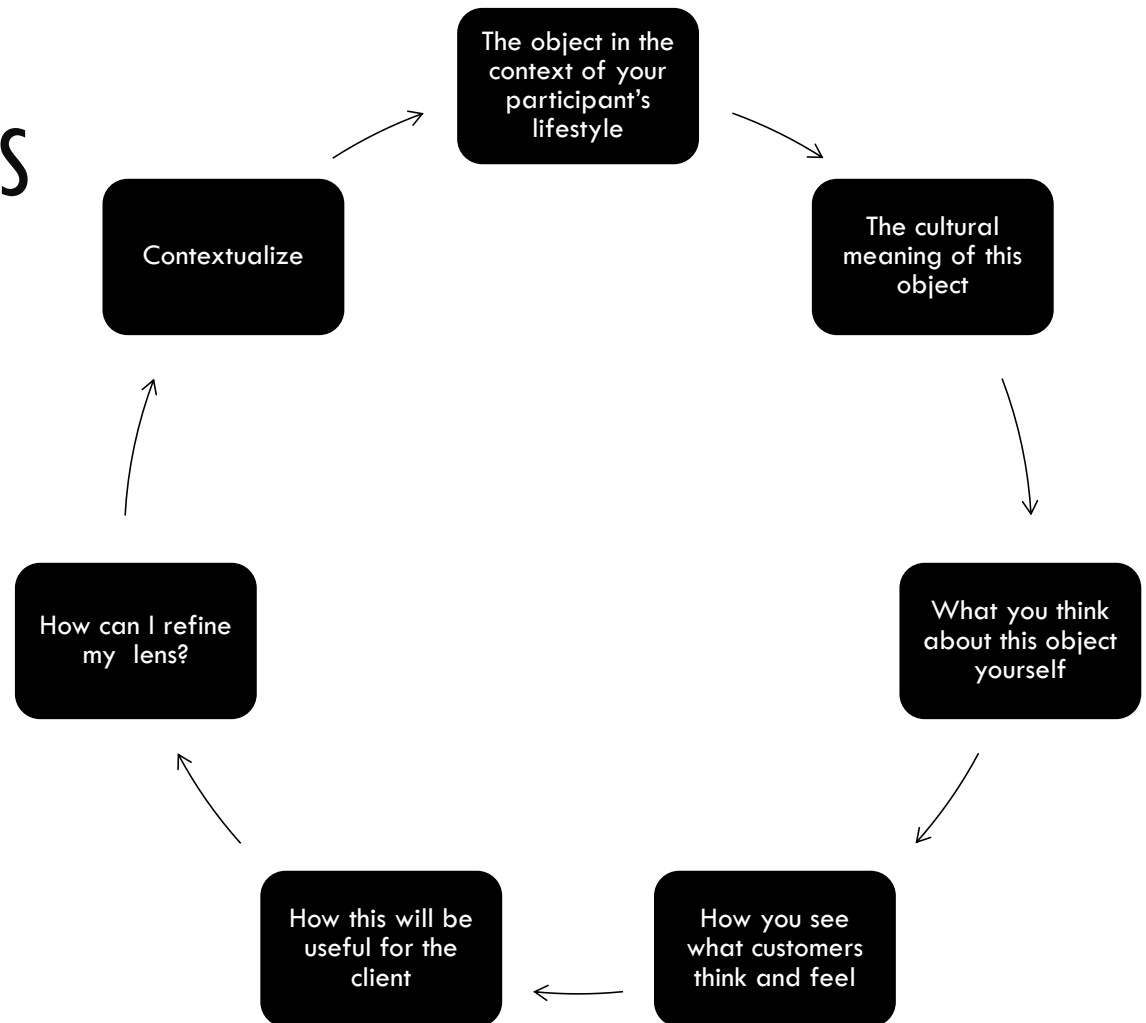


Disregard your preconceptions and listen to what people are actually saying

Do not wear your answers too early in the process

ITERATIVE PROCESS

There are no clear boundaries between research problem, data collection, data analysis and insight generation.



QUESTIONS?

WHAT IS THE VALUE OF INTERVIEWS



In depth understanding of a topic



A cultural understanding



Translating client (or scientific) problems
into cultural puzzles



Contextualizing objects into their
cultural context (in consumption settings)



A COUCH IS NEVER JUST A
COUCH

A MAD MEN LIVING ROOM

Social class

Taste

Cultural narratives

Family status

Values

Accessibility

Life stage

Rituals

Aspirations

Pets



CONTEXTUALIZE YOUR DATA IN OTHER DATA

Secondary resources

Cultural text

- News archives, specialty publications, blogs, visual data

Prior work

FROM CLIENT QUESTION TO INSIGHTS



Client Question

How do we increase sales/retention rates of our customers?



Cultural Question

What is the role of our products in how people build homes?



Interview Questions

What does your couch mean to you?



Cultural Insight

How do we design products to increase the value of our products in domestic practices?

QUESTIONS?

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Standardized Interviews

- Formally structured
- Same questions asked for everyone in the same order with same wording

Semi-standardized Interviews

- Guided or focused
- Questions and wording adjusted
- Scheduled and unscheduled probes

Unstandardized Interviews

- Informal or nondirective
- No pre-determined set of questions
- Interviewee guides the interview process

LET'S DO "SEMI-STANDARDIZED"

Problem: Client wants to increase sales of a new line of higher end line of furniture.



**SO... YOU WANT TO UNDERSTAND
HOW PEOPLE CHOOSE COUCHES**

Why do you use a couch?

Do you like this couch?

Why don't you like this couch?

- How do you think people will answer these questions?
- Is there a better way to ask these questions?
- Are there better questions?

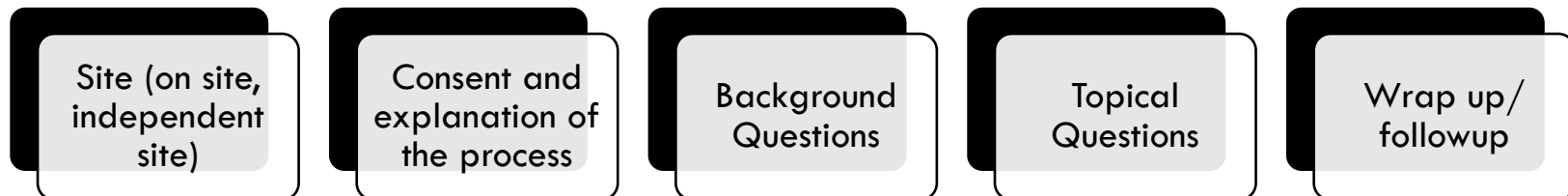
START WITH A REFLEXIVE FRAME

“What is furniture for and what does this particular person do with furniture?”

- Expanding the client's frame.
- Expect your interviews to change and gain focus as you get a deeper and clearer sense of what is going on



INTERVIEW STRUCTURE



BEGIN

Start with broadly explaining the research context (not the specific question)

- “I am interested in how people choose and use furniture”

Get consent

BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

Understand the life of the participant

- Can you tell me about yourself
 - Probes
- Contextualizing questions
 - Tell me about your your interests and hobbies
 - Tell me about your education and your job

TOPICAL QUESTIONS

Contextual

- Can you tell me about what home means to you?
- Can you tell me about a typical weekday/weekend at home
- Can you tell me about your ideal home?

Focused

- Can you tell me about your favorite furniture in your home?
- Tell me about how you chose [particular object]?
- Can you tell me about your dream couch?

ASK OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS

- Tell me about a time when; tell me about you and x;
 - Not: did you xyz? (story)
- How do you **feel** about that? (emotions)
- What did you **think** about that? (attitudes)
- What was that like? (emotions)
- How do you do that? (process/story)
- Can you walk me through... (process)
- Can you tell me how that is different from_____? (contrast, clarification)
- What is easy/hard about that? (pain points)
- What do you wish was different about that?
- In a perfect world what would that be like?

CLIENT/RESEARCHER QUESTIONS VERSUS INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

“Why are you not using the new feature of our product”

Instead start with: “Tell me about the time when you tried our new product”

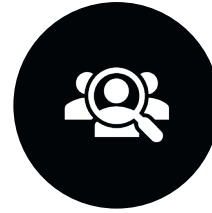
“We would like to understand how to maintain loyalty to our meal kits”

Instead start with: “Tell me about last time you cooked with a meal kit”

“We would like to understand why our consumers resist upgrading to new phone models?”

Instead start with: “Tell me about your current phone and what you like about it?”

PROBES



THE MOST IMPORTANT
(AND DIFFICULT) SKILL
TO LEARN



UNPACKING THE TAKEN
FOR GRANTED



ACTIVE LISTENING

PROBE STARTER PACK

Silent probes

- Nods, puzzled looks, smiling, raised eyebrow.

Elaboration probes

- That's interesting! Tell me more.
- Really?
- How do you do that?
- What is that?
- Could you tell me a bit more about that?

Break preconceptions

- Be naïve, and act like you don't know what they mean (because you really don't)
- What do you mean by "an IKEA home?" (Instead of imposing what YOU think about IKEA)

DO A FEW INTERVIEWS AND THEN RETREAT

Rethink:

- The questions (research AND interview)
- The wording of questions
- The probes you've missed
- The people you should interview next

QUESTIONS?

QUESTIONS TO AVOID

Leading questions

- ~~What kind of difficulties did you face when you first started using the new software?~~
- Tell me about your first day with this software

Closed questions: Questions that will result in single word answers

- ~~Do you enjoy furniture shopping?~~
- Tell me about how you feel about furniture shopping

Questions with too much jargon or theory

- ~~We'd like to understand how middle-class metropolitan consumers create a sense of home through practicing taste~~
- Tell me about your home and what you like about it and what you'd like to change

BEHAVIORS THAT “CLOSE” INTERVIEWS

Yes or no questions

Completing others' sentences

Statements that demonstrate full empathy

Theorizing about what they just said, or
responding for them

- Interviewee: When I entered the coffee shop, it felt good.
- Interviewer: So you felt at home, I guess?

TIPS

Use and make sense of silence

- Give time for the responder to answer your question
- Silence is not always “empty” data

Make empathic statements without fully “getting” them

- “That must be very disappointing... Can you tell me more about it?”
- (Instead of “I completely understand how you feel”-which closes the dialogue)

Let people talk

- Avoid unintentional interruptions
- Tactfully steer them away from off topic discussion
- Mentally plan your next probe without interrupting the person

ALWAYS

Ask: “Is there anything else you’d like to tell me about [topic]?”

CONCLUSION

The interview is there to uncover what you don't know, understand, experience

- Also, what your participant might never have considered explicitly
- Not to test a hypothesis or validate assumptions or reaffirm client's preconceptions

Understand the experience of the people you study and hear them

- Deep design, instead of superficial attributes
- Instead of "Mid century modern furniture is trendy" understand why the style made a comeback and what this style means to consumers

CONCLUSION

An interview is a series of translations
(this is where knowledge of social
theories help!)

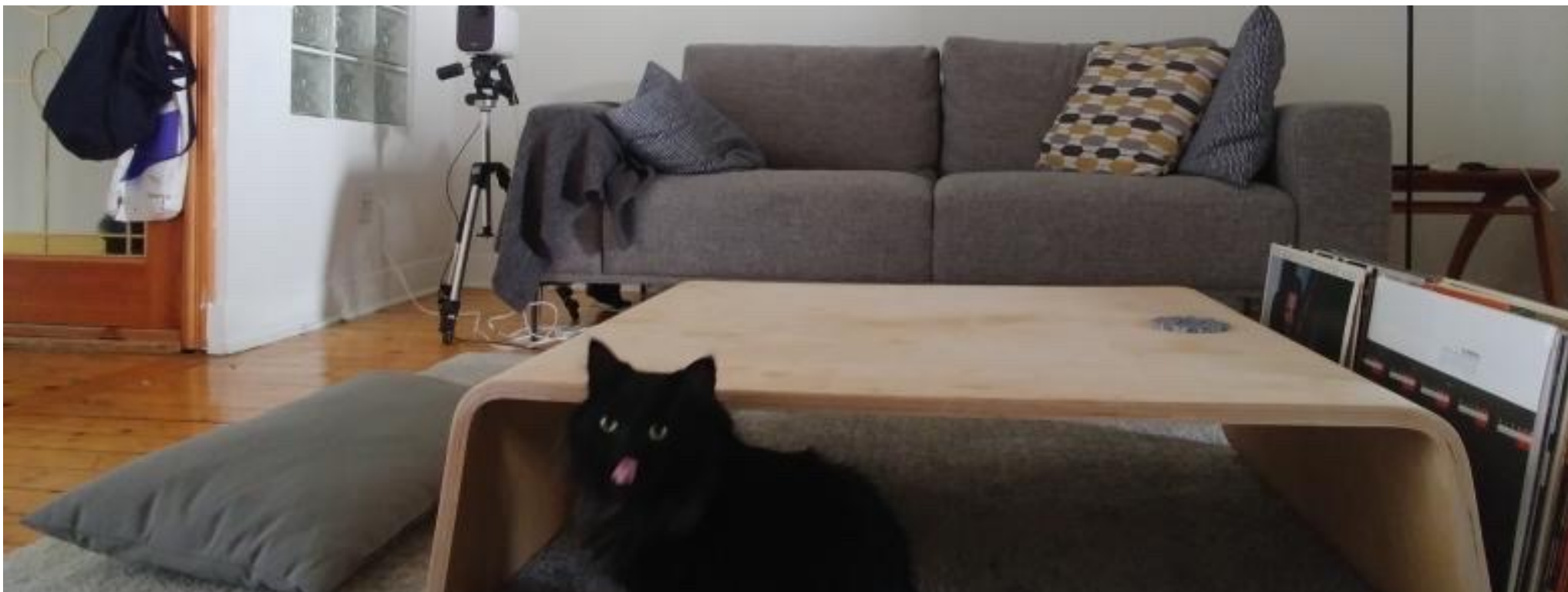
- Client to researcher
- Researcher to interviewee
- Interviewee to researcher
- Researcher to client

**MORE
QUESTIONS?**

Zeynep Arsel zeynep.arsel@concordia.ca

<http://zeyneparsel.org> (you can download the tutorial here!)

<http://twitter.com/zeyneparsel>



THANK YOU! |