

These key recommendations from the multi-site POE were combined in a single Full Service Lobby test site that was evaluated prior to being “rolled out” nationwide. Features include:

- Newly designed graphics, information, and casework for the take-a-number dispenser and system.
- Elimination of the parcel slide, with the addition of sufficient surfaces for writing and resting packages.
- Redesigned cashier station with adequate workspace, a location that reinforces visibility, and sufficient queuing space in front of it.
- Improved relationship between layout, circulation, and function by locating primary merchandise display sections (especially stamps) where they are easily seen and accessed by customers and ensuring clear view and circulation throughout the area so customers can see and reach all key elements.

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OVERVIEW

To design environments suited to what people do in them, we must understand environmental behavior: *Who does what with whom?* In what *relationship*, *sociocultural context*, and *physical setting*? This chapter proposes that by looking at how environments affect people’s ability to see, hear, touch, smell, and perceive each other, we can begin to understand how environments impinge on social behavior.

Environmental elements that affect relationships include barriers such as walls, screens, objects, and symbols; and fields, such as shape, orientation, size, and environmental conditions. Design decisions about these elements have identifiable side effects for social behavior.

Environmental-behavior descriptions that can enable designers to improve control over behavioral side effects of their decisions include six elements: actor, act, significant others, relationships, context, and setting.

The next three chapters discuss how to find out about people’s feelings, attitudes, perceptions, and knowledge—namely, by asking questions.

CHAPTER 10

FOCUSED INTERVIEWS

Asking questions in interviews and questionnaires means posing questions systematically to find out what people think, feel, do, know, believe, and expect. When we think of a focused interview we generally have in mind the type of group questioning used in market research and when we think of a questionnaire, we think of the yes/no or multiple-choice questions of most public opinion polls. The term “interview,” meaning any form of face-to-face questioning is so broad it can lose its meaning in a sentence describing a research project, such as “We interviewed the building manager.” In almost all cases of E-B research, interviewers ask questions to learn how an individual feels about, perceives, or otherwise reacts to a particular environment or situation. For this purpose, the mix of structure and open-endedness that the focused interview technique provides is helpful. The popular form of group interview discussed at the end of this chapter is a variation of this basic method. In most cases, when E-B researchers say they are carrying out interviews, they are actually using a form of focused interview.

You can use focused interviews with individuals to find out in depth how people define a concrete situation, what they consider important about it, what effects they intended their actions to have in the situation, and how they feel about it. Originally formulated to tap reactions to films of military instruction and propaganda, radio broadcasts, and other mass communication devices, focused interviews are particularly suited to the needs of environment-behavior researchers interested in reactions to particular environments. Many of the concepts this chapter explains and the way it explains them are based on Merton, Fiske, and Kendall’s insightful and inventive book *The Focused Interview* (1956).

PRE-INTERVIEW ANALYSIS AND INTERVIEW GUIDE

To understand thoroughly how someone reacts to a situation, an interviewer cannot just start asking haphazard questions. She must first analyze the structure of that situation, always using observational research methods and sometimes theory in doing this. This analysis can then be used as the framework for discussing the situation in detail with the respondent. Such a situational analysis guides the discussion; the interviewee's responses are used to test, refine, and modify the analysis. A skilled focused interviewer negotiates with a respondent to find correspondence between his own analytic structure and the respondent's mental picture of the situation. By structuring the information themselves, focused-interview respondents become participants in the research.

The *interview guide* is a loose conceptual map, such as a family might draw up before taking a cross-country camping trip. It lays out major sights to see, places to stay, and so on. After the trip begins, the family members find some of the sights closed, others uninteresting, and others so arresting that they stay longer than expected. They also find that they do not drive as many miles as planned each day and that the children like to stop to eat more often than originally planned. Every day they adjust their plans, and end up having a fine trip that mixes the plans they made on the basis of advance analysis with reactions to events as encountered. Skilled focused interviewers similarly modify their original plans to correspond to the conceptual map reflected in the respondent's answers. That conceptual map is the respondent's definition of the situation for which the interviewer is searching.

In the focused-interview guide, the map is a set of topics, elements, patterns, and relationships that the interviewer tentatively intends to cover. Adjustments to the guide during the interview are carried out by skillful use of the major focused-interview tool, the *probe*: the interviewer's prompting for further elaboration of an answer. An interviewer probes to find out how a respondent's definition of the situation differs from the hypothesized one; this information allows the interviewer to adjust and refine the guide. The researcher's goal is to determine which of the many hypothesized elements are important to the respondent and then to understand as thoroughly as possible what these elements mean in the respondent's definition of the situation.

To avoid misunderstandings, one should know that for surveys in which questions are posed with prescribed rigidity, a "good interviewer" is one who adheres to the text and never develops his own initiative. In a focused interview, the opposite is true.

OBJECTIVES OF FOCUSED INTERVIEWS

Definition of the Situation

An individual's *definition of a situation* is the way she sees and interprets it—the personal light in which a particular event is cast. This definition influences the way she responds to that event.

For example, during focused interviews custodians, school administrators, and neighboring residents reported that children ruined public lawns by playing ball on them and broke public street furniture by jumping on it (Zeisel, 1976a). Teenagers involved in these activities described them differently. They played ball in open fields to avoid the danger of traffic and the bother of people walking by. They hung around benches and play equipment in tot lots because the equipment was convenient for sitting, climbing, and jumping. In the beginning of this school property-damage study, the research team heard repeated reports from administrators of costly "vandalism" at the schools. The investigators assumed, along with the respondents, that the property damage was indeed "vandalism"—maliciously carried out—until, of course, they got the teenagers' definition of the situation.

Knowing how participants define a situation helps to interpret data gathered through other methods, no matter how unreasonable the respondent's definition sounds. To keep an open mind and see situations as others see them, one must be prepared to find as many definitions as there are participants.

Strength of Respondents' Feelings

Throughout any design project, decisions about priorities are made. In housing, is it more important to plan direct access to cars from apartments or to keep cars parked far from the front door? Is it more important for patients in a cancer-treatment center to wait with relatives, or is modesty more important for them, which is maintained by waiting alone? Designers making such tradeoffs can better control the side effects of their decisions if they know the strength of respondents' feelings about convenient access, a view free of automobiles, relatives' support, and modesty.

Intentions

Observing behavior and physical traces tells investigators about the unintended consequences of activities. In Boston's West End "urban village," men spent a lot of time on the street washing and polishing their cars. Observations showed that the men polished their cars next to one another and talked to passersby as well, creating a close-knit network of neighborhood friends. This social contact is another consequence of car washing in this neighborhood. Both consequences could be observed in the situation, but only by asking the actors what their intentions are can researchers distinguish conscious intent from unintentional side effects. Did the men, in fact, wash their cars to keep them clean or expressly to maintain social contacts?

BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF FOCUSED INTERVIEWING

Focused interviewing has the following characteristics:

1. Persons interviewed are known to have been involved in a particular concrete situation: they have worked in the same office building, lived in the

same neighborhood, or taken part in an uncontrolled but observed social situation, such as a tenants' meeting, a street demonstration, or a design review session.

2. An E-B researcher has carried out a situational analysis to identify provisionally any hypothetically significant elements, patterns, and processes of the situation. The researcher has arrived at a set of hypotheses about what aspects of the situation are important for those involved in it, what meaning these aspects have, and what effects they have on participants.

3. On the basis of this analysis, the investigator develops an interview guide, setting forth major areas of inquiry and hypotheses.

4. The interview about subjective experiences of persons exposed to the already-analyzed situation is an effort to ascertain their definitions of the situation.

5. The basic interview tool is the probe.

PROBES

Probes are primarily questions that interviewers interpose to get a respondent to clarify a point, to explain further what she meant, to continue talking, or to shift the topic. The probe is the systematic development of an everyday device used in conversation when one person is actually interested in what another has to say.

- *Addition probes* encourage respondents to keep talking—to keep the flow of the interview moving.
- *Reflecting probes* determine in a non-directed way which of the analyzed topics in the interview guide are significant to the respondent and which new ones should be added because they were overlooked.
- *Transitional probes* ensure that the respondent discusses a broad range of salient topics.
- *Situational probes* stimulate the respondent to specify which parts of a situation prompted the responses.
- *Emotion probes* encourage in depth discussion of how the respondent feels about each specified part of the situation.
- *Personal probes* get respondents to describe how the context of their lives influenced their reactions.

This chapter will discuss each type of probe, showing with examples how each can be used to enrich an interview.

Addition Probes to Promote Flow

Addition probes urge respondents to continue talking by conveying the researcher's interest in what is being said. Skillful interviewers use addition probes to get respondents to express themselves more fully and to keep the overall flow of the interview moving. They are so simple and natural that interviewers sometimes use them inadvertently.

Addition probes may be *encouragements* such as "Uh-huh," "I see," "Yes," "Good," "That's interesting," or "I understand," interjected during and after answers. Encouragements can be combined with *body movement* probes, such as nodding your head, leaning forward, looking directly at the respondent, and putting your hand to your chin thoughtfully. Skillful interviewers invent a number of such probes. If it seems inappropriate to make utterances, interviewers can combine attentive body movements with one of the most difficult types of probes—*attentive silences*. This probe, during which an interviewer patiently waits for the respondent to begin or to continue speaking, requires much tact

Focused-Interview Probes and Their Purposes	
Probe	Purpose
<i>Addition</i>	<i>Flow</i>
Encouragement Body movement Attentive silence	
<i>Reflecting</i>	<i>Nondirection</i>
Echo Question-to-question Attentive listening	
<i>Transition</i>	<i>Range</i>
Cued Reversion Mutation	
<i>Situation</i>	<i>Specificity</i>
Re-presentation Environmental walk-through Reconstruction	
<i>Emotion</i>	<i>Depth</i>
Feeling Projection Attentive listening	
<i>Personal</i>	<i>Context</i>
Self-description Parallel	

and skill because the lack of conversation between two persons alone in a room is uncomfortable. This silence is socially unacceptable in many Western cultures, and as a result, inexperienced interviewers often fill up a silence by asking another question or by changing the topic.

They may be unwittingly stopping the respondent from finishing a difficult answer that he would just as soon avoid because it may be a particularly weighty topic for him and is likely significant for the interviewer.

Reflecting Probes to Achieve Non-direction

Non-direction pervades the focused interview. Respondents, rather than interviewers, decide what issues and elements are salient to them and will be discussed and which are irrelevant. Interviews that include non-direction are often mistakenly lumped into the term *qualitative interview* because researchers using this method seldom count answers. This technique often deludes inexperienced interviewers into believing they can carry out interviews with little or no preparation. The ideal focus interview would be one in which the interviewer analyzes a situation—its parts, patterns, relationships, and overall structure—and then asks one general, unstructured question. The ideal respondent then launches into a monologue in which he describes his feelings about each topic, pointing out in detail which are and are not relevant to him and adding new topics that the interviewer has overlooked.

Ideal interviews do not occur. Respondents mention important issues but seldom raise and then discard unimportant ones. The interviewer must bring up various topics in order to find out whether a particular topic was not raised because the respondent thought it was obvious or because he thought it irrelevant. Few respondents are specific enough about issues or explain their responses in sufficient depth. The interviewer's job is to test and modify the interview guide by inferring from the discussion how well the respondent's definition of the situation meets the guide's hypothetical one. To do this, the interviewer uses probes to ensure that the discussion covers all the hypothesized topics, leaving room for the respondent to raise additional ones. The interviewer also makes sure that each topic is discussed in enough detail and depth.

The focused interviewer's success is closely linked to her skill in using addition and reflecting probes to encourage complete reporting from respondents without telling them directly what to talk about. Beginning the interview with general, unstructured questions, the interviewer urges the respondent to express which topics are important and which are unimportant, and what types of answers are relevant for the different questions. As the interview continues and topics are discussed at length, the interviewer divides and focuses general questions into more specific ones, sometimes even suggesting the types of possible answers. These more structured questions are based on the sometimes-implicit leads that respondents provide when they answer general, unstructured questions.

Example

Int: What is your general feeling about this hospital?

Resp: I really like it.

Int: What do you particularly like about it?

Resp: Well, I don't know.

Int: (Nods head and listens silently)

Resp: I suppose the thing I like best is the waiting areas; a real person has taken the time to put personal things on the walls and tables.

Int: What do you mean when you say you like that best?

Resp: I mean it makes me feel comfortable, like I don't mind being here.

Int: Is there anything else here that makes you feel that way?

Comment

General unstructured question

Respondent expresses a general feeling
Focus on aspect of environment that
generated expressed feeling
Stalling tactic to think

Body movement and silence probes
Focused answer explaining with
greater specificity what it is about
hospital environment respondent likes

Question probing depth of feeling

Focused answer beginning to explain
feeling more completely

Question structuring response
category but keeping stimulus
unstructured

While the interviewer probes and focuses, the respondent sets the stage, directing the conversation into areas she feels are important. This procedure enables interviewers to find out two things at the same time: which topics respondents think are relevant and how they feel about these topics.

To avoid directing the focused interview, a useful position for an interviewer to take is that of a *potential convert* to the respondent's point of view. The crucial word here is *potential*, because interviewers who voice strong agreement or disagreement may inhibit further explanation of a topic. Respondents may not go on if they feel they have convinced the interviewer or feel they have come up against a brick wall. The trick is to use probes to show the respondent that by continuing her report, she may indeed make a convert of the mildly skeptical interviewer.

Direction can also be avoided by reflecting the respondent's own words back at them. One reflecting probe is the *echo probe* (Richardson, Dohrenwend, and Klein, 1965), in which the interviewer literally repeats the respondent's last phrase in the form of a question:

Example

Resp: The thing I like best about this place is its location.

Int: Its location?

Resp: Yes, you know, the fact that it is right near two bus stops and a store.

Comment

General response

Echo probe

Focused response specifying
stimulus

An equally simple reflective probe is the *question-to-question probe*. The interviewer employs this probe by answering a respondent's question with a question, to avoid stating an opinion:

Example

Resp: What did the architect think when she put these windows next to the playing field?

Int: You mean it is not clear what the architect had in mind when she did this?
Resp: No. She obviously didn't think about the fact that kids on the playing field are always being rough and showing off to other kids by breaking everything in sight that's breakable.

A third reflective probe, the *attentive-listening probe*, demands more interviewer participation. The interviewer listens for the implied meaning of the respondent's remarks, repeating back to the respondent as a question what the interviewer believes is meant:

Example

Int: Is there anything you do regularly on a daily basis in the building?
Resp: I always go down to get my mail late in the morning, at least half an hour after the mail arrives. This way I don't meet anyone and no one knows if I get mail or not.

Int: You mean it bothers you if there are other people there who see that you might not receive any mail for a day or two?

Resp: Yes, it's none of their business. I like to meet my friends when I want to, but I don't like to be forced to see them when I am doing chores around the building.

Transition Probes to Extend Range

The *range* of an interview is the number of topics it covers that are relevant to the respondent and to the situation or environment that is the interview's focus. Extensive range is often a measure of the quality of an interview. Probes can extend range by making certain that the discussion covers the topics listed in the interview guide, any, unanticipated topics the respondent brings up, and topics that suggest interrelations between the focused interview and data from other research projects. In maintaining sufficient range in an interview, it is difficult to move from one topic to another without giving the respondent the impression that the interviewer is running the show. The major danger is that respondents may become passive and wait for the interviewer to ask a series of structured questions, thereby destroying the purpose of the interview.

Comment

Respondent's question to interviewer, apparently for clarification

Question-to-question probe

Focused response explaining situation from respondent's point of view

Comment

General question about routines

Descriptive response about personal routine

Attentive-listening probe

Focused response explaining resident's avoidance behavior in terms of forced meetings

In easy interviews respondents demonstrate their involvement with each topic by giving short shrift to irrelevant items and discussing in depth topics that hold meaning for them. When this occurs, a skilled interviewer stays out of the picture, yet listens closely to the order in which topics are covered as an indication of their importance within the respondent's definition of the situation.

When such ideal conditions do not occur, the interviewer uses *transition probes* to facilitate movement from topic to topic with a minimum of overt direction. In focused interviews several situations requiring transition probes arise regularly. For example, respondents may continue to discuss a topic the interviewer feels has been covered with sufficient specificity, depth, and context at detailed levels of abstraction. The interviewer can then use a *cued transition probe*, in which "the interviewer so adapts a remark or an allusion by an interviewee as to ease him into consideration of a new topic" (Merton et al., 1956, p. 58). Cued probes use analogy, association of ideas, or shifts in emphasis to effect smooth transitions.

Example

Resp: (School maintenance worker discussing maintainability in various areas of the school) . . . another thing particularly convenient about cleaning the bathroom is the special water faucets there, although the outlets might be a bit larger to allow water to get out faster.

Int: Another place with readily available water must be the school swimming pool. How is that as far as maintenance is concerned?

Resp: In the swimming pool, water is not the main maintenance problem. There it is the type of tile; it is difficult to clean . . .

Comment

Final remarks of a sufficiently detailed explanation

Cued probe using the topic of water to move from a discussion of lavatories to one of play facilities

Response related to new interview topic

When a respondent finds herself discussing a topic with intense personal meaning, her answers become highly charged. She may try to change the subject either because of unpleasant associations or because she does not feel at ease talking about important things with a stranger. Since such topics may be particularly relevant to the study, an interviewer tries to keep respondents on the topic by showing how interested he is using silence and body probes.

If a respondent nevertheless moves on to a new topic, the interviewer is better off dropping the topic and picking it up later in a new context or when rapport with the respondent has improved. A mental or written note to use such a *reversion probe* will help. Reversion probes take advantage of a connection that is at least superficial to bring up a topic insufficiently covered earlier:

Int: That reminds me of something we spoke about earlier.

or

Int: Isn't this a continuation of the point you made before?

A reversion probe is particularly useful when a respondent becomes disinterested from an interesting topic to focus on one that interests her still more. The interviewer knows there will be no difficulty returning to the first topic but hesitates to do so quickly for fear of interrupting the respondent's train of thought.

Another common situation is one in which the respondent, happy to have an audience, warms up to a topic that has nothing to do with the subject of the interview. A lonely hospital patient who is asked to discuss a hospital setting, for example, may show the interviewer pictures of his grandchildren and discuss them in detail—their ages, education, and exploits. The interviewer should be grateful for such excursions because they strengthen rapport with the respondent. Nevertheless, cued transitions help to bring the conversation on track:

Example

Resp: . . . and my fourth grandchild just started nursery school . . .

Int: That raises the issue of families visiting patients in the hospital.

Where do you entertain your family?

Resp: Usually my family sits in the bedroom with me, but when the grandchildren come we sit in the dayroom.

Comment

Irrelevant discussion

Cued probe

Response moved back to interview topic: the hospital setting

With garrulous respondents, however, an interviewer may need to resort to *mutation probes* that blatantly change the subject. Mutation probes are generally unstructured questions, and raise questions out of context, with no reference to previous discussions. Interviewers must use mutation probes sparingly. Otherwise they can cut off discussion of relevant topics because they are too tired to listen carefully or because the topic is mistakenly not on their interview guide. Potentially informative leads are easily lost this way. The temptation to use mutation probes unwisely is particularly great at the end of an interview when some topics have not been covered. The interviewer wants to translate his guide topics into specific questions and ask these in rapid succession. As a rule, if an interviewer does not have the time to follow up on a topic, it is inefficient to raise it using mutation probes, in fact, it is better to skip the topic altogether.

Situation Probes to Encourage Specificity

Specificity in the focused interview is a respondent's ability to state with precision which elements in a situation she reacted to and in what way, rather than just saying that the situation as a whole had an effect on her. Specificity

is vital if you want to understand respondents' reactions to such complex environments as housing projects. Merton et al. (1956) point out that the importance of specificity was evident in Chapin's early research on public housing; Chapin (1940) studied the gains in social participation that can be attributed "to the effects of living in the [public] housing project." As he recognized, "improved housing" is an unanalyzed "experimental" situation: managerial policies, increased leisure, architectural provision for group meetings, and a host of other items are varying elements of the program of "improved housing" (p. 7).

Chapin used focused interviews to find out what specifically about the housing project influenced people's social participation. Researchers interested in influencing design decisions need to know which decision in a complex set of decisions has had what effects.

Interviewers who want respondents to specify further a particular stimulus situation can ask them to do so directly:

Int: What in particular did you like about the building?

or

Int: What part of the schoolyard do you play in most?

The more an interviewer repeats references to the stimulus situation, especially in a series of progressively detailed questions, the more likely the respondent is to make reference to specific parts of the environment.

Researchers can either initially request that respondents specify aspects of the environment and then discuss their reactions to each aspect or ask respondents to describe a reaction, and follow up by asking for further specification of what is being reacted to. Merton et al. (1956, pp. 71–72) surprisingly found the latter sequence of questions more effective in achieving specificity—namely, first eliciting a description of reactions, then asking respondents to specify just what was being reacted to.

Example

Int: How do you feel about the office you work in?

Resp: I feel that if I don't always stay aware of where I am, I'll get lost.

Int: What is it about your office that makes you feel that way?

Resp: The windows. I can't see any windows from where I work, so I never know what time it is or which direction I'm facing.

Comment

General question requesting reaction to environment

General response describing reaction to environment

Probe requesting specification of environmental stimulus

Focused specification of environmental stimulus

When interviewers repeatedly request specification of an environmental stimulus, respondents may revert to mere description of the environment. Interpreting a request for specification as a request for information, they may try to remember as many details about the environment as they can—even irrel-

evant ones. To avoid this pitfall and to elicit sufficiently specifying responses, interviewers can use probes aimed at helping respondents clearly remember the settings they are asked to specify.

Using *re-presentation probes*, interviewers present respondents with a photograph or drawing of some part of the setting being discussed—a doorway, an area, a piece of hardware. This active probe is least directive when the picture is presented *after* the respondent has verbally identified an element or place as relevant to him.

Example

	<i>Comment</i>
<i>Int:</i> What in the school causes the most maintenance problems?	Request for general information about problems
<i>Resp:</i> Well, we have the most trouble keeping the thermostats in order.	Mention of an object
<i>Int:</i> (Presenting photograph of thermostat to respondent) Here is a photograph of the type of thermostat you use throughout the building. What is there about it that gives you the most trouble?	Re-presentation probe, combining photograph of object with request for specification
<i>Resp:</i> If you look closely, you can see how flimsy the adjustment switch is. When kids fool with the switch or even when faculty members try to adjust the temperature, the switch often breaks off. This means we have to replace the whole unit at cost . . .	Focused response specifying aspect of object that causes reaction

Graphic re-presentations can be used together with cued transition probes or with mutation probes if interviewers want to discover respondents' reactions to a broad range of environments. Re-presentations then take on the added directive nature of these other probes.

A special case of re-presentation, the *environmental walk-through probe*, can be used if the focused interview takes place in the environment that is the topic of the interview. During a walk-through the interviewer asks the respondent to point out and describe places and objects that are important to him. For particularly salient items the interviewer and respondent can stop to specify more precisely what about the item is relevant.

A walk-through is not just a guided tour. To get the most out of an environmental walk-through, interviewers first question the respondent in one place, asking him to describe the environment they will walk through, and his general reactions to it. As places and objects are mentioned, the interviewer discusses them up to the point of requesting detailed specification, noting these items for later reference during the walk-through. In this way, the interviewer uses the respondent's personal definition of the situation to define important elements and the walk-through to elicit further specification.

Reconstruction probes may be used when respondents have trouble remembering the setting they are asked about or when they remember it only in

general terms. Reconstruction probes ask respondents to think back to particular events in a place in order to recall their reactions to it *at the time* the event took place.

Int: When you first entered the hospital three weeks ago, which entrance did you use?

or

Int: What do you remember about the last time you sat at your old desk, before moving to this office?

When the respondent refers to a complex set of phenomena that she remembers only as a whole or when she replies "I don't know" or "I can't remember" after being asked to specify her answers, reconstruction probes often help switch her attention to specifics.

Example

	<i>Comment</i>
<i>Int:</i> How do you feel about the park?	General request for information on feelings
<i>Resp:</i> I think it is a particularly good place to come with my children.	General report of feelings
<i>Int:</i> What makes it a good place for children?	Specifying probe
<i>Resp:</i> I don't know, it's just the way it's planned.	"I don't know" meaning "I can't verbalize it."
<i>Int:</i> Well, do you remember the last time you went to the park with your kids?	Reconstruction probe
<i>Resp:</i> Yes, we played hide-and-seek on the curved pathways, and . . .	Response beginning to reconstruct specific situations

Reconstruction probes help respondents to look retrospectively at the situation they are commenting on—to bring themselves back in time and re-experience the setting. In general, specifying probes do more than isolate specific parts of a whole situation for analysis. By linking specific parts to specific respondent reactions, they set up the interview so that each reaction can be explored in depth.

Emotion Probes to Increase Depth

Depth in a focused interview is the degree to which the respondent's feelings about a situation are explored. Reports that a respondent "likes" or "dislikes" a place, that it is "very satisfying," or that it is a "frightening" place can signify a variety of things. For example, someone can dislike her workplace but choose to work there because it is better than any other place she has found. Or a street can be frightening to someone, but the fear can be such a peripheral concern that it does not hinder his walking there.

Interviewers use *emotion probes* to determine how strongly a person feels about a response he has given. The probes encourage respondents to explore and explain in depth the meaning and richness of general expressions of feelings. Emotion probes keep respondents from merely describing a setting by directing them to explain their feelings about it as well.

Feeling probes continually use the term *feel* or *feeling* in questions or repeatedly ask respondents to explain what they mean by a given, generally expressed feeling.

Example

Resp: I am frightened by the teenagers who walk through the project.

Int: What do you mean, "I am frightened"?

Resp: The teenagers are rough and could hurt us. We are old.

Int: Are you actually afraid they will harm you?

Resp: No. In fact, they are actually well-behaved if you talk to them. They just walk across the lawn where there is no path and sometimes throw rocks at the lights.

Int: What do you feel about this?

Resp: I am very angry that they do not obey the rules, but I am glad that the kids respect our being old and that they stay out of our front yards.

A series of feeling probes can bring to the surface strongly felt sentiments that initially appear to be peripheral, and can show seemingly deeply felt sentiment to be no more than offhand remarks. As a rule, no briefly expressed sentiment ought to be taken at face value until it has been probed in depth.

Another probe for depth of emotion is the *projection probe*, in which interviewers ask respondents to project their feelings about a situation onto another, hypothetical person. This is useful when discussing sensitive emotions that the respondent himself might not admit having but would be at ease admitting that "others" or "someone else" might have.

Example

Int: How do you feel about playing at the central basketball court with the older kids?

Resp: I don't mind. I'll play anywhere. I play there sometimes, and sometimes I play on the smaller court down the block.

Int: Why do you use the smaller court?

Resp: Because I just don't feel like

Comment

General reaction

Feeling probe

Descriptive response

Feeling probe

Specifying response

Feeling probe

Depth response

hassling with the older kids.

Int: Does anybody avoid the central courts because they're afraid?

Resp: Sure, some kids are really afraid of getting picked on by the older kids.

Some even avoid walking down the block if they know that someone playing on the central court is after them.

reaction

Projection probe

Projective response describing feelings of "some kids" in depth

When respondents seem to avoid answering a feeling question, this is a clue to interviewers that they should try a projection probe—particularly when respondents deny that they personally have a certain feeling. At the same time, interviewers must be careful not to think that every response referring to "a friend" or "someone else" actually describes respondents' unexpressed feelings. The ability to make such distinctions increases with interviewing experience.

A final emotion probe is the *attentive-listening probe*, in which interviewers listen for the meaning implied in the respondent's answer and make this meaning explicit in a follow-up probe:

Example

Int: How do you feel about the rules that the school principal makes about what you can and cannot do on school grounds?

Resp: He has a right to make any rules he wants. But they should apply equally to all grades, not just to us seventh- and eighth-graders.

Int: You mean you feel you are being treated unfairly?

Resp: Yes, it really makes me angry that they can . . .

Comment

General request for feelings about a specific subject

Response obliquely describing reactions and feelings

Attentive-listening probe

In-depth feeling response

Sometimes stating implied feelings in terms of limits to action—or extremes—allows respondents to reject the extreme statement and clarify what they were trying to say.

Example

Resp: I can't think of any place I'd rather live.

Int: Does that mean you like it here so much you wouldn't move for anything?

Resp: Not exactly. If my best friend bought a house where it is warmer, I'd consider moving.

Comment

Seemingly extreme statement of feeling

Extreme attentive-listening probe

Rejection of extreme restatement and clarification of attachment to residence

Interviewers should be careful not to put words in a respondent's mouth by restating implied feelings approximately and using a feeling probe too forcefully: "You did mean this, didn't you?"

