

Characteristics of the Interview Situation in a Manila Survey

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A data collection technique in wide use among social scientists is the interview sample survey. The interview sample survey involves interviewing a representative sample of the study population with a standard set of questions. This technique is used frequently in the Philippines, and its use is expected to become even more frequent in the future.

The thesis of this paper is that because of its origin in American culture the interview survey makes certain assumptions about the interview situation which may not be true in the Philippines; these possibly erroneous assumptions may invalidate the data gathered. It will be recommended that study of the interview situation and its possibly biasing effects be made a regular part of surveys conducted in this country. Finally, some data describing the interview situation encountered in a Manila Survey will be presented.¹

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¹Two recent articles on this same subject are Philip M. Hauser, "Family Planning and Population Programs," *Demography*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (1967), pp. 397-414; and Harvey M. Choldin, A. Majced Khan, and B. Hosne Ara, "Cultural Complications in Fertility Interviewing," in the same issue of *Demography*; pp. 244-252.

Assumptions of the Survey Interview

Interviewer training manuals describe in considerable detail the behaviors expected of the interviewer and the respondent during the interview. The interviewer is expected to be courteous at all times, yet she must keep the interview moving along the paths dictated by the standard schedule of questions. The interviewer should listen attentively to what the respondent has to say, but she should not indicate by comment or expression what she herself thinks of the topic, the respondent, or the responses. It is hoped the respondent will look upon the interviewer as a peer, a co-equal from whom there is nothing to gain and nothing to fear, but who is genuinely interested in her and her opinions. If this rapport is achieved it is expected that the respondent will talk freely and frankly even about matters which are personal and potentially damaging.

The orientation of the respondent-interviewer role relationship may be succinctly described in terms of Parson's pattern variables as universalistic, performance oriented, specific and affectively neutral.² The participants are expected to

²The pattern variables are discussed in Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, Inc., 1951).

treat each other as one of a large class of persons to whom the same general rules apply; hence, the role is universalistic. They should evaluate each other only in terms of their performance in the role, and not in terms of social class, ethnicity, or other ascribed characteristics; hence, the role is performance oriented. Interaction ought to be limited to matters which expedite the successful conclusion of the interview; hence, the role is specific. Finally, while there should develop a feeling of trust and rapport between the participants, they should not react emotionally to one another; hence, the role is affectively neutral.

In order that these orientations may develop, the interviewer is advised to seek favorable external conditions such as privacy and a minimum of distractions. It is maintained that the interviewer will be more successful in her attempt to establish a proper role relationship if the respondent is isolated from other and competing roles.

Compatibility of Values and Interview Assumptions

The interview situation which has been described is, of course, an ideal type which is rarely fully achieved in actual surveys. It is clear, however, from the popularity of surveys in the United States, and the demonstrated reliability and validity of the information acquired from them, that the ideal interview is closely approximated in a majority of cases in that country. This suggests that the characteristics of the interview discussed above are essentially compatible with dominant values in American culture; or in an alternative formulation, that the characteristics of the interview were derived from dominant values in American culture.

Support for this assertion can be found in Robin Williams' listing of general dimensions in American values.³ Williams lists the following American value dimensions: active mastery of the environment; interest in the external world; an emphasis on change rather than stability; faith in rationalism; orderliness; a universalistic ethic; "horizontal" rather than "vertical" interpersonal relationships; and emphasis on the individual personality rather than the group. The fit between these value dimensions and the orientations required in the ideal interviewer-respondent role relationship is good. Persons who are orderly and rational, who approve of equality in interpersonal relationships, and who have a universalistic ethic are probably able to adjust readily to a situation which calls upon them to sit down alone with a stranger and share with him facts and opinions of a personal nature, while still retaining a degree of emotional detachment.

The interview survey technique in use in the Philippines diffused from the United States, and appears to make the same assumptions about characteristics of the interview that are made in that country. It may be questioned, however, that values of Philippine culture are as essentially compatible with the unmodified characteristics of the ideal interview situation as those of the United States. Jaime Bulatao has provided a useful description of the value dimensions of Manileños based on analysis of stories written by ninety respondents.⁴ Bulatao iden-

³ Robin M. Williams, Jr., *American Society: A Sociological Interpretation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), pp. 441-42.

⁴ Jaime C. Bulatao, "The Manileños Main-springs," in Frank Lynch (compiler), *Four Readings on Philippine Values*, Institute of Philippine Culture Papers, No. 2 (Quezon City, Philippines: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1968), pp. 50-86.

tifies four basic values: emotional closeness and security in a family; approval by the authority figure and by society, authority's surrogate; economic and social betterment; and patience, suffering and endurance. The contrast between Williams' description of American values and Bulatao's description of Manileño values is clear: whereas the American is said to value the individual above the group, the Filipino is said to place the family above the individual; whereas the American is said to favor equalitarian relationships, the Filipino is said to approve of and submit to authoritarian relationships; whereas the American is said to struggle against his environment, the Filipino is said to resign himself to it. Only the Filipino desire for economic security would be likely to be included in Williams' list of American values.

If the dimensions of the American value system are a good fit for the orientations desirable in the survey interview, then the substantially different Filipino values must fit the interview less well. In a summary discussion of Manileño values, Bulatao suggests the unifying concept of an ego highly in need of security and protection. "It values the tender, secure relationships of the family. It protects itself against the dangers of the harsh world outside the family by great carefulness; the care not to take unnecessary risks; the determination to be careful of what other people say; not to antagonize others or create potential enemies, to seek the approval and protection of important people."⁵ Can the person in possession of such an ego sit down alone with a stranger, usually of different social status, and share with him information and opinions which often bear on matters of great im-

portance to the security of the family and the self, at the same time maintaining the degree of emotional detachment necessary for accuracy and efficiency? At one point Bulatao seems to provide a direct answer to that question; he says, "One does not reveal one's real thoughts completely to strangers, foreigners, or powerful individuals, but only those aspects of one's thoughts which will be acceptable to them."⁶

There are numerous interpretations of American and Filipino values, some of which are at odds with those cited above as evidence for the relatively incompatibility of Filipino values with the ideal interview. The question of which is the correct interpretation of American or Filipino values is not the issue here, and should not distract from the central point being made. That point is this: the interview survey technique in use in the Philippines originally developed in and was shaped by, a culture which is different in important respects from Filipino culture: therefore, the assumptions about the interview situation may be false in the Filipino context. If the assumptions are false, then it is also likely that the information collected does not conform to the standards of validity and reliability expected in social science research.

This situation should not cause undue alarm to users of the survey interview technique. The technique has already demonstrated its utility in this country; any problems which may exist do not threaten that basic utility, but only hinder the attainment of higher standards of reliability and validity. The problems which exist can probably be overcome by some modifications in the technique and/or by special analytic approaches.

⁵ Ibid., p. 84

⁶ Ibid., p. 64

Before such corrective action can be taken, however, more must be known about the conditions of the interview in Philippine surveys. We need to know what the external conditions of the interview are, how the respondent and the interviewer behave, how they conceive of one another, how they define their own roles, and much more. And we must know how these variations in the interview situation affect the data collected. It may be found that such differences as exist between Filipino conditions and those assumed by the originators of the survey interviewer have little practical effect on the quality of the data. If, however, significant effects are discovered, then courses of corrective action will be open.

The Interview Situation in a Manila Survey

As a source of information about the interview situation, each interview survey should routinely include some questions pertaining to that subject. It is not unusual for this to be done in surveys, but to this date the efforts have not been systematic and are rarely reported to other researchers. The remainder of this paper will report data describing some aspects of the interview situation encountered in a survey conducted in Manila. It is hoped that the data will add to understanding of the interview survey under Philippine conditions, and will illustrate useful approaches for future studies.

The survey under consideration is the "Survey of Migration and Fertility" conducted by the Population Institute of the University of the Philippines in 1966. Interviews were conducted with approximately 900 ever-married women selected by probability sampling methods from the population of Manila. Interviewers were

hired by the Population Institute and underwent an intensive training program. The main part of the interview schedule dealt with the respondent's fertility history, attitudes toward and knowledge of family planning, and residence history. At the end of the schedule was a short section about the interview situation which was filled out by the interviewer after she left the home. For present purposes, therefore, the survey provides descriptive information about the interview situation encountered in a sample of Manila households. For this paper a randomly selected 20 per cent subsample of the interview schedules was analyzed.⁷

In the Manila survey considerable attention was directed to one aspect of the interview situation: the presence of persons other than the interview and respondent during the interview. The usual assumption about interviews is that data will be more valid and reliable if the interview is conducted in private. If others are present, especially persons with whom the respondent has established role relationships, the respondent may feel inhibited by customary social norms from expressing her private opinions. In other words, attainment of the universalistic, performance oriented, specific, and affectively neutral orientation in the interviewer-respondent role relationship is hindered by the presence of competing role partners. The frequency with which the goal of privacy in the interview is attained in, say, American surveys is unknown, but there seems to be an implicit assumption that privacy is usually attained, or that deviations from that goal have little practical effect.

⁷ A more complete description of the sample, procedures, and preliminary findings of the study is presented in William F. Pratt, "Family Size and Expectations in Manila" (unpublished typescript).

It will be seen from Table 1 that privacy in the interview is relatively rare in Manila. In nearly three-fourths of the sample interviews at least one person other than the interviewer and the respondent were present during the interview. The median number of others present was three. In one case the number of people in the audience was fifteen.

Table 1
Percentage Distribution of Interviews
By Number of Persons Present
(In Addition to Interviewer and
Respondent)

Number Present	Percentage Distribution
(Number of cases)	(164)
All interviews	100%
None	28
1	10
2	13
3	19
4	13
5 or more	17

Several conditions in the Philippines make it probable that the interview will not be conducted in privacy as often as in a country such as the United States. For one thing, the number of people in the typical household is relatively large in the Philippines; thus, more people are likely to be in or around the house when the interviewer comes. Also, the number of rooms in a house is smaller, and the average number of persons per room is higher; thus, it is more difficult for the interviewer and the respondent to find an unoccupied corner for a private talk. There may be cultural factors, also, which make privacy more difficult to achieve in the Philippines.

Some of the characteristics of the onlookers to the interview are presented in Table 2. Children are present in about one-half of the interviews, and other adults are also present in about one-half of the interviews. If only the interviews in which some others were present are considered, children were present in about two-thirds, and other adults also present in about two-thirds. Onlookers were somewhat more likely to be females than males; but mixed sex groups of onlookers were more common than single sex groups. It was especially rare for only males to be present as onlookers. Those present during the interview were usually relatives. Children of the respondent were in nearly one-half of the interviews, and husbands were present in close to one-fifth of the interviews. Friends, servants, and other nonrelated persons were present in less than one-fifth of the interviews. Although there is considerable variation in the number and relationship of others present during the interview, it appears that the typical interview is conducted with two or three others present who are members of the respondent's immediate family.

Evaluation of the effect of others' presence on the quality of data collected in the interview is difficult. Perhaps a beginning can be made by examining some brief descriptions of interview situations provided by the interviewers themselves. Interviewers were asked to note down any unusual circumstances which may have affected responses in the interview. Often these comments concerned other people present. One interviewer, for instance, wrote: "Respondent consulted her husband on matters concerning dates. Husband tried to kid his wife on the subject of birth control. He usually says, 'She heard that method from friends,

Table 2
 Percentage Distribution of Interviews by
 Characteristics of Others Present:
 Age, Sex, Relation to Respondent

Characteristic	Percentage Distribution	
	All Interviews	With Others Present
(Number of Cases)	(164)	(118)
<i>Age</i>	100%	100%
No others present	28	—
Children only	18	26
Adults only	21	29
Both	32	44
Not reported	1	1
<i>Sex</i>	100%	100%
No others present	28	—
Female only	18	25
Male only	9	12
Both	42	59
Not reported	3	4
<i>Relationship*</i>		
No others present	28	—
Husband	17	23
Own children	48	67
Mother, mother-in-law	7	9
Sister	9	12
Other Kin	21	30
Friends, Others	15	21

* Adds to more than 100% because interviews can be classified in more than one category.

she's a gossip you know.' At times he gave his own opinion such as on the advantages and disadvantages of having too many children."

Another interview is described as follows: "Respondent was indifferent. She left me often to attend to her cooking and so, who was left to answer some questions was her older daughter, those (questions) concerning dates. Occasionally this daughter consulted the respondent to check up

the dates she gave. She, the daughter, had to answer this part (about dates of birth) for the respondent did not like to leave the kitchen. Other kin had to answer their own dates and places of birth. When it came to kinship ties, I told the respondent's daughter that it is her mother who should answer them. Respondent was called. She asked me whether all these things are important. At this point the husband came and

he answered those pertaining to kinship ties of the husband."

These two descriptions, which are typical of those written by interviewers, in this survey, suggest ways that others presence may affect data collected in the interview. It seems probable that when someone "kicks" the respondent about the questions, as the husband did in the first interview, her answers will be different in some way from what they would have been if given in private. And when the person answering the questions is not the respondent at all, as in the second interview, almost certainly the data is different than it would have been had the designated person answered. On the other hand, in these interviews, and in many others, it is apparent that the answers given by non-respondents usually dealt with objective facts rather than opinions, and often the person actually giving the response was in a better position to report the item accurately than the respondent herself. Birthdates, places of residence on particular dates, and other factual matters can often be reported with equal or better accuracy by some person other than the designated respondent. In fact, in the second interview described above, it seems probable that the uncooperative attitude of the respondent might have prevented the interviewer from getting any information without the assistance of other people present.

The net effect of others' presence on the quality remains problematical. It is possible, however, to specify in greater detail the behavior of the others present during the interview. In Table 3 are presented the distributions of the interviewers' answers to three questions: Did others present answer questions or suggest answers to the respondent? Did the respondent consult others present before

answering? Did the husband (if present) answer questions? It will be noted that in nearly three-fourths of the interviews in which others were present, they did *not* answer questions and were *not* consulted by the respondent. In slightly more than one-half of the interviews in which the husband was present, he answered some of the questions. Thus it appears that although others are typically present during the interview, they do not typically take an active, verbal part in the proceedings.

A direct test of the hypothesis that the presence of others causes respondents to alter their answers may be undertaken by comparing the pattern of responses in the two types of interview, those in which others were present and those in which they were not. A comparison of this type is presented in Table 4. Respondents were asked if they thought their children's chances in life were better than, the same as, or worse than their own. In Table 4 responses to that question are presented for two categories of interview: those with one or more of the respondent's own children were present, and those in which none of the respondent's children were present. A plausible hypothesis which suggested this comparison is that respondents would be more likely to predict greater success for their children if they were present to hear the judgment than if they were not present. It is found, in fact, that the highest proportion saying their children's chances are "better" is found where the children were present, but the proportion is only slightly lower in interviews where the children were not present. In fact the difference is not large enough to reach statistical significance at the 5 per cent level. Even if the difference were significant, it would be methodologically risky to attribute it

to the presence of others without first controlling for other variables which might explain it. This test, then, must be regarded as inconclusive. It does,

however, serve to illustrate a procedure which may be useful to investigate the response effect of variations in interview conditions.

Table 3
Percentage Distribution of Interviews by Frequency of Participation of Others: Others Answering Questions, Respondent Consulting Others, Husband Answering

Type of Participation	Percentage Distribution	
	All interviews	With others present
(Number of cases)	(164)	(118)
<i>Did others answer?</i>	100%	100%
No others present	28	—
Yes	15	21
No	53	75
Not reported	3	4
<i>Did R. consult others?</i>	100%	100%
No others present	28	—
Yes	17	23
No	52	72
Not reported	3	5
<i>Did husband answer*</i>	100%	100%
Husband not present	83	—
Yes	9	54
No	7	42
Not reported	1	4

* Number of interviews in which husband was present was 26.

Table 4
Percentage Distribution of Respondents
By Evaluation of Children's Future Changes
By Presence of Children During Interview

Children's luck compared to own	Children's Presence	
	Present	Not Present
(Number of Cases)	(80)	(88)
All children	100%	100%
Better	71	59
Same, worse, uncertain	29	41

$X^2 = 2.72$; $.05 < p < .10$

Not all of the information available from the Manila survey about the interview situation deals with others who were present. One item of potentially great significance is the frequency with which the respondent asked for the *interviewer's* opinion on a matter under discussion. A frequent comment about interviewing in Asian countries is that respondents tend to give the answer which they believe is desired by the interviewer. This is termed the "courtesy response" because it is believed to derive from a highly developed sense of courtesy. Earlier in this paper Jaime Bulatao was quoted as saying that Filipinos are careful to tell strangers, especially those above them in status, what will be pleasant to their ears. If this tendency exists in the survey interview situation, it might be expected that the respondent would make some attempt to determine what the interviewer's opinion is, perhaps by asking her directly. Apparently this does not occur very often; interviewers report that only in about 7 per cent of the interviews did the respondent ask for the interviewer's opinion. It is true, of course, that the courtesy response tendency may operate in more subtle ways; it is not always necessary to ask someone directly to guess what they think. Nevertheless, this finding can be regarded as one item of evidence against the hypothesis of a widespread and strong operation of the tendency, at least among Manileños.

Summary and Conclusion

In this paper it was first observed that the interview survey as practiced abroad and in this country makes certain assumptions about the orientations of interviewer and respondent, and about the external conditions under which the inter-

view takes place. Those assumptions, it was argued, probably derived from, and certainly are compatible with, dominant value themes in American culture; those same assumptions are probably less compatible with the values of Filipino culture, and some specific value conflicts were suggested. This incompatibility may result in biases in the data collected, biases which should be empirically investigated, and if necessary corrected. As an illustration and beginning of that investigation, data describing the interview situation encountered in a Manila survey conducted by the Population Institute were presented. These data indicate that contrary to assumptions usually made about the survey, interviews in Manila were rarely conducted in private; other persons, often close family members, were usually present during the interview. These onlookers to the interview sometimes suggested answers and otherwise took part in the proceedings, but the net effect of their presence on the quality of the data remains unclear. An attempt to determine if the presence of the respondent's children affect her response to a specific question involving them produced results which conformed to the hypothesis, but were statistically insignificant, and hence, inconclusive. The "courtesy response" tendency so often hypothesized to exist in surveys in Asia was questioned by the infrequency of instances in which the respondent showed an active interest in the interviewer's opinions.

The sample interview survey is an efficient technique for obtaining reasonably accurate information about many aspects of a society. It has special advantages in a society such as the Philippines where there is much to learn, little time to learn it, and few funds available

for the purpose. It should, therefore, be used and used often. At the same time let it be kept in mind that this, like all measurement devices, is not always accurate. The survey interview technique is especially subject to error when applied in a country like the Philippines, because it was developed for use in societies with

significantly different characteristics. Such error can be corrected, but before that will be possible, social scientists in the Philippines must give some attention to the conditions under which interviews are given, and the effects of those conditions on the validity and reliability of responses.