Dialogic Interviewing and Flickers of Transformation: An Examination and Delineation of Interactional Strategies That Promote Participant Self-Reflexivity

Amy K. Way[1], Robin Kanak Zwier[1], and Sarah J. Tracy[2]

Abstract

This article identifies practices in qualitative interviews that evoke research participant reflexivity and change. By engaging interviews in a dialogic manner, researchers can encourage participant perspective-taking and non-judgmental involvement that can lead to flickers of transformation. The study draws on empirical material from three different projects to locate critical incidents of dialogic interviewing. We propose a typology of dialogic interviewing strategies that accompany reflexivity—namely, (a) probing questions, (b) member reflections, and (c) counterfactual prompting. These strategies illustrate the transformative power of dialogic interviewing and serve as a guide for researchers who desire their interviews to not only be methods for gathering knowledge but also methods for intervention and critical reflection.

Research participants are not "cultural dopes" (Giddens, 1979, p. 71)—rather, "they can give cogent reasons for their intentions and actions, and generally demonstrate a sophisticated (although not necessarily social scientific) understanding of the situations they inhabit" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000, p. 573). Unfortunately, all too often in our interview practices, we are so busy listening for understanding, we gloss over situations in which participants recognize, reflect on, and sometimes create spaces for change in their own viewpoints.

This project began with our interest in instances of participants' self-reflexivity and self-interrogation across several research studies. While conducting interviews, we became fascinated by occasions where participants engaged in spontaneous self-reflexivity about their responses, sometimes going so far as to rethink or revise espoused beliefs and opinions, even after an initial certainty or steadfastness. For example, one young boy, after suggesting he would never want to be a full-time homemaker, suddenly realized that perhaps his future wife may also want to avoid this fate. With this interest in mind, we returned to our interview transcripts to explicitly identify these moments of self-reflexivity and transformation. It is our belief that such occurrences demand attention, not only in their potential for understanding transformation but also for the richness available when participants explicitly work through their own process of sensemaking.

We, like many qualitative scholars, approach our craft with a basic assumption of reality as a communicative construction (e.g., Holstein & Gubrium, 1997; Kvale, 1996; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Tracy, 2013). That said, it seems all too often this social constructionist ontology is lost in the actual practice of conducting research. Hyde and Bineham (2000) explain,

> while many of us understand [social constructionist] theory, far fewer of us live it . . . We spend much of our lives struggling with the way things "are," rather than savoring the malleability that a constitutive view of language, fully distinguished, might lend our world. (p. 214)

The widely accepted practice of interviewing as a method for empirical research is often treated as a reporting process where the truth is "out there" to be discovered, rather than a "transform[ation of] information into shared experience" (Denzin, 2001, p. 24). From a communication transmission model (e.g., Corman, Trethewey, & Goodall,

[1]Villanova University, PA, USA
[2]Arizona State University, Phoenix, USA

Corresponding Author:
Amy K. Way, Department of Communication, Villanova University, 800 Lancaster Ave., Villanova, PA 19085, USA.
Email: amy.way@villanova.edu

2007; Grossberg, 1982), an interview is simply an exchange of existing information. And yet, such an assumption stands in contradiction to the social constructionist ontology so many scholars espouse. If we believe reality is socially, specifically communicatively, constructed, it makes sense to treat interviews as opportunities for meaning making and transformation and to "question the distinctions we make between what is fact or fiction, the nature of knowledge, and ultimately our purpose and practice as researchers" (Cunliffe, 2003, p. 985). The purpose of our research then, is to highlight meaning as it unfolds before us and consider how we can encourage participant reflection in a way that better allows us to "capture the complex, interactional and emergent nature of our social experience" (Cunliffe, 2003, p. 984).

We open the article by considering methodological approaches that highlight the transformative potential of research as well as acknowledge participants as agents of change. We then consider dialogic approaches to communication as a way of transforming the focus of the interview to one of shared meaning creation. Dialogue encourages perspective-taking and non-judgmental engagement to achieve a deep understanding. In our methods section, we describe a critical incident approach for locating such transformations, given the rarity of their occurrence. The article closes with a typology of critical interview strategies that are associated with participant reflexivity. It is our hope that these strategies may be helpful for qualitative scholars and an impetus for conversation about the value and process of a critical interview methodology. Such an approach reminds us how participants are individuals embedded in a larger social narrative and that our relationships influence their experiences of their own subjectivity.

Transformation Through Interview Dialogue

In our analysis, we regard interviewees as relevant stakeholders actively involved as research collaborators, rather than "subjects" from whom to squeeze knowledge (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; Ozanne & Saatcioglu, 2008). By partnering researcher's academic knowledge and the collaborators' own experiences, we can "address difficult situations and transform reality" (Gómez, Puigvert, & Flecha, 2011, p. 238). Perhaps some might take issue with our use of the word *transformation*, as it implies some sort of stable reality in the first place. We recognize lived experience as constant instability and negotiation of meaning; however, even as we understand that realities are not stable or fixed, we communicate and act in the world as though they are. Thus, the ability to recognize a shift in one's personal beliefs, no matter how fleeting or ongoing is important as participant experiences will "have different shapes depending on the various discourses through which they are constructed and constrained" (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005, p. 186). Furthermore, we argue, the reflection and self-interrogation of participants' understandings is rich and often unexamined.

Viewing interview practice as intervention has a rich history. Emancipatory narrative research (Wogelmuth & Donohue, 2006) combines Boler's (1999) pedagogy of discomfort with active interviewing techniques (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003), to facilitate "the explicit intent of transforming participants' lives by opening up new subjective possibilities" (p. 1024). The researcher is instructed to adopt an ethic of empathy and friendship; approach research as a witness to the participant's story rather than a spectator; create participant, self, and social ambiguity; and encourage participant hope. Although each of these techniques provide important insight into the process required for research as intervention, they tend to focus on the researcher's responsibility for creating transformation, rather than highlighting the participants' and their own process of self-reflection. Could there be another approach?

In their research with male executive gatekeepers, Tracy and Rivera (2010) noticed situations where participants seemed uneasy or uncomfortable with certain ways of framing a situation (as noted by their hesitations, disfluencies, and talk repairs) and did conversational work to reframe them. These "flickers of transformation" or moments of "self-questioning, talk repair, and transformation" (p. 14) demonstrate participants' own process of transformation, revealing the ways "talk shifted on the spot to account for their uncertainty and the potentially unfinished or underdeveloped nature of their beliefs about a subject" (p. 7). These "flickers of transformation" illustrate how scripts might be disrupted or interrupted simply by talking through them.

Indeed, dialogue allows space for questioning, change, and transformation by encouraging individuals to authentically engage with others and suspend their judgments and assumptions. Ontologically, dialogue refers to a way of relating to another, characterized by awareness and acceptance of the other as a human being (Hyde & Bineham, 2000; Johannessen, 1971). Buber (1958) distinguished between two modes of interaction and relationship: the first where participants engage with an idea of the other, treating that person as an object or an experience rather than as a human being, and the second involving the mutual recognition of the other as a holistic being leading the interaction to be characterized by a sense of honesty, fellowship, lack of manipulative intent, intensity, and love (Johannessen, 1971). Dialogue as a discursive mode is characterized by collaboration and the suspension of pre-conceived assumptions (Barge, 2002).

The emphasis on recognition and acknowledgment of the other makes dialogic communication a powerful vehicle for change and transformation at both individual and societal levels. Dialogue forces participants to recognize

similarities, as well as differences, between themselves and others (Barge, 2002). This shifts participants' view of reality from an "either/or" to a more complex "both/and" perspective where participants are able to develop subtle understandings of similarities and differences, rather than viewing issues as polarizing.

In sum, a dialogic approach allows people to suspend assumptions about the world, open themselves to new viewpoints, and abandon a win–lose perspective. When interviewers engage in dialogue, participants are met by kindness and acceptance, enabling them to let down their defenses and listen to *themselves*. This self-talk and self-questioning, in turn, can lead to transformations in sedimented scripts or beliefs. So how do we create such an approach in practice? Although the use of dialogue in interviewing is already touted as theoretically useful (Flecha, Pulido, & Christou, 2011; Russell & Kelly, 2002), it would be valuable to better understand the interactional cues that accompany an interviewee engaging in self-questioning. Thus, we raise the following research question:

> **Research Question 1:** What interviewing strategies and techniques were associated with flickers of transformation and explicit self-reflexivity in participants?

We focus on the communicative strategies and techniques that bring about such reflection, and show how such situations interactionally unfold.

Method

For the current project, we examined empirical material that had originally been gathered without our knowing that they might someday be analyzed in terms of what they could tell us about "flickers of transformation." Indeed, it is important to realize that in none of the projects did we as researchers intentionally try to encourage transformation in our participants. Rather, after interviews had been conducted, we noticed moments when people engaged in self-reflexivity and transformation in the course of the conversation. As communication scholars, in this project we are interested in empirically examining the conversational particulars that surround these moments of reflection and transformation.

Participant Background and Interview Approach

Because of the relative infrequency of flickers of transformation, to identify instances of self-reflexivity, we relied on critical incident sampling, "appropriate for exploring data related to incidents or people that are unique given the research being pursued" (Tracy, 2013, p. 137). We draw from empirical material across three studies: (a) male executive gatekeepers, (b) correctional officers, and (c) youth apprentices—and the interview excerpts analyzed here

represent a very small percentage of the collected materials. In each study, we found that participants occasionally articulated strong and often deeply sedimented, but relatively unexamined opinions. In the studies of correctional officers and youth apprentices, the authors spent an extended amount of time in their sites (ranging from several months to a year) and developed a familiarity and rapport with interview participants. In the case of research with male executive gatekeepers, a male research assistant was trained to conduct the interviews—a practice that created a sense of familiarity with interview participants that being interviewed by a female researcher might not have.

Male executive gatekeepers. This interview study targeted 13 male executives in charge of hiring, firing, and promotion decisions and asked them about work-life balance and their hopes and dreams for their children (Tracy & Rivera, 2010). Participants ranged in age from 30 to 49, lived in the Southwest and Midwest United States, and worked in a variety of industries. All interviewees were heterosexual and married with children who ranged in age from infancy to young adulthood. Interviews, each about an hour in length, resulted in 211 single-spaced pages of transcription.

Correctional officers. Correctional officers were interviewed from two facilities located on the outskirts of a large metropolitan city in a Western state in the United States (Tracy, 2005). Interviews were conducted with 22 correctional officers, 2/3 of whom were male and 85% Caucasian, about the emotional highs and lows in their job and how they dealt with contradiction and identity threatening issues in the workplace. Interviews ranged from 45 min to 2 hr and when transcribed, resulted in 398 pages of single-spaced text.

Youth apprentices. The third study involved youth (age 12-21) participating in a worker apprentice program, run through a well-known national nonprofit organization serving 4 million youth at over 4,000 clubs throughout the United States (A. K. Way, 2012). Youth volunteered approximately 40 hr a week in their local club, serving as assistants to staff members running summer camps and other regular programs. Interviews with 49 apprentices focused on how youth envisioned the role of work in their lives among other activities and obligations. Interviews ranged from 28 to 86 min, averaging 58 min and resulted in 670 pages of single-spaced text.

Analysis Practices

We began our analysis by identifying critical incidents in which our participants engaged in self-reflexivity and flickers of transformation in their interviews. We read and re-read these examples as a group, examining the interactional moves that accompanied or proceeded openness,

self-interrogation, and reflexivity. Examples of first-level descriptive codes (Tracy, 2013) included "counterfactual thinking," "magic wand," "mirroring," and "reassurance." First and second authors, Amy and Robin, met multiple times to discuss the emerging analysis. From one of these discussion, the codes were grouped together into six axial categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), including "counterfactual thinking," "member checks," "reassurance," "probing questions," "advantages and disadvantages," and "resisting assumptions." From these six categories, the authors regrouped and condensed categories until reaching agreement on the three major strategies presented below. In the findings that follow, we illustrate a specific set of practices that accompanied dialogic interview experiences where participants engaged in self-interrogation and reflection.

Interactional Strategies for Dialogic Interviewing

In what follows, we illustrate three key strategies associated with dialogic interviews and flickers of transformation. These include (a) probing questions, (b) member reflections, and (c) counterfactual prompting. Within each are more specific tactics. For conceptual clarity, the findings are organized via overall strategy. The reader should keep in mind though, that dialogue is fluid, many of the strategies bleed together in practice, and a single talk-turn may represent multiple strategies.

Probing Questions

Probing questions prompt participants to reflect on, explain, and modify initial statements. In first author Amy's interview with Orlando, 15, he originally states he would not want his wife to work. When he asserts this opinion for the second time, she says, "Yeah? How come?" and at another point, "Why do you think that is?" He follows, "I'd rather her be a stay-at-home mom with the kids. So she can spend more time with the kids." He elaborates further, saying, "That's how it is in my family, its traditional . . . the guy works and the mother stays at home." These answers hook into a broader discourse that shapes belief systems (namely traditional marriage arrangements with men in the public sphere and women in the private sphere). In hearing himself articulate such a perspective, though, he pauses and questions himself. He explains, "because my family is old fashioned, it's just—I don't know, new times are coming. Maybe she wants to work or something?" In the explicit articulation of how these assumptions would play out in practice, coupled with Amy's gentle probing, Orlando found space to question those beliefs.

For Lexi, 12, Amy's question about what type of job she could imagine for her future husband revealed important insights about what she values in work and in a husband and father. When she says she does not want her husband to be "a sewage person" the interaction unfolds as follows:

AW: Why is that something you don't want him to do?

Lexi: Well, it doesn't make that much money. If I'm not going to work or work half-time, we have to pay the bills and have money to do stuff. And maybe the hours, wherever he works, I don't want them to be too long, 'cause I'd want him to be home with the kids and I.

AW: Yeah. Why is it important for him to be home with you and the kids?

Lexi: Because we have to be a family. It can't just be me and the kids all the time and dad just works to provide the money. We have to be all together and happy and the kids have to love both of us equally.

By asking Lexi to explain her reservations about having "a sewage person" as a partner, she articulates fairly progressive beliefs about fatherhood and family (e.g., wanting a husband who actively takes part in home and family). This is significant because without asking for further explanation, Lexi would not have had the chance to interrogate her own assumptions about what it looks like to be a family, specifically a mother and a father.

In the following excerpt, Amy asks Joaquin, 15, if anyone else in his family works besides his father:

Joaquin: Well, I don't know. Does community service count? 'Cause my mom . . .

AW: Do you think it counts?

Joaquin: Yeah, it could. They say—well, it's not really community service, some people call it. My mom goes to the town hall and they cut our bill for our house so it helps us live. There's, like, they give out food. They give out food, I guess, somehow. So like whatever comes early in the morning around 7:00, usually Tuesdays and Thursdays, and she would help them. They bring in from the food bank food, and she'd give it out.

AW: Yeah. So do you think that's work?

Joaquin: Well, yeah. Kind of. To me it is.

AW: Why kind of?

Joaquin: Well, I say it's kind of not, because it's helping the community. But then again, she's trying to help us, so it's kind of work at times and it's kind of not. She's not getting paid, but then the bill thing.

Here, we see that Amy encourages Joaquin to question whether or not his mom's service to the community counts as work. This prompts him to narrate his own beliefs, perhaps in

a way he had not before, and implicates discourses about of what "counts" as work. Asking participants to articulate opinions they may have never before uttered can be a useful tool in terms of identifying the discourses that guide their thinking. When Amy asks Luisa, 13, if she will be given the most valuable employee award at the end of her summer job, she indicates doubt because she works part-time while attending summer school. Only after Amy's probe, "Why not?" does she begin to question the notion that she is only working part-time:

> Because a lot of the staff . . . they see that only that I don't—like, "Oh, you don't work the full hours like we do." But I'm still basically working at school. I work at school, then I come here. So it's like I do different types of work, but I still work all the time. I'm not fooling around.

Here we see that the policing of her work by her peers, who only recognize work as full-time and discount nonstandard work, shapes Luisa's thoughts and practices around her performance of worker. Probing questions encourage participants to verbalize or think aloud about their beliefs, letting the interviewer in on their process of sensemaking, "placing stimuli into some kind of framework" (Weick, 1995, p. 4) that enables them to "comprehend, understand, explain, attribute, extrapolate and predict" (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988, p. 51) past and future actions.

Probing questions may be especially valuable when participants express uncertainty. Probing requires rapport and trust with participants; in Amy's case, something she accomplished via her long-term participation in the scene. Time spent up front joking and asking participants about their interests can pave a path for participants feeling comfortable to question themselves and give voice to their own uncertainty. By tapping into that uncertainty, probing can essentially be accomplished by the participant, not just the researcher.

In the following example, the interviewer asks a male executive the following question: "What type of husband would your daughter need in order to be successful in the workplace?" In response, the male executive pauses, and asks with incredulity in his voice and as though he must have misheard the question, "In the workplace?" The interviewer responds with a nondefensive, "Yeah." The executive goes on to say:

> I think it's real important that the, the mom stays at home, during the first couple of years of having a baby, so I mean, I think career driven women who want to continue working and I think that's a, that's a tough call. I mean, I wouldn't want my wife to work, you know, and then take a couple of months off and then go back to work and have the baby at day care. I don't really agree with that. So I think there, I think those things need to be, her husband needs to be able, maybe to agree on, you know, how they are going to approach those things instead of

just having a baby and, you know, I don't, you know, it's just kind of tough. I think the career should probably be for, I think for my daughter, it would be nice if she waited 'til, I don't know, after she has children or something, I don't know, but. I don't know, I mean wait 'til the children are a certain age. 'Cause it's tough to have children and have a career, right?

In this excerpt, we see a lot of verbal disfluencies—something that specifically cues emotional arousal, stress, and uncertainty—such as talking about something very complicated or never before considered (Erard, 2007). The participant audiences his own uncertainty as he answers this question. Later in the interview, the executive begins to redirect and eventually even shares a story about some friends who switched traditional bread-winning and caregiving gender roles and made it work. He did this in light of probing questions, an interviewer free from passing judgment, and listening to (and redirecting) his own talk on the topic. Knowing what not to say as an interviewer is just as important as asking the right follow-up questions.

Resisting problematic formulations. A crucial component of properly executing probing questions is to avoid "problematic formulations" defined by Roulston, deMarrais, and Lewis (2003) as "statements in which speakers paraphrase prior utterances through preserving, deleting, and transforming information produced by other speakers" (p. 695). Formulations can shut down further explanation or opportunities for dialogic interaction. When Amy asked Orlando if he would ever be the primary caregiver for his future children while his spouse worked, he asked for clarification. But Amy's refusal to sum up or affirm his own summing up led him to explain his position further and eventually question his beliefs.

AW: Would you ever stay at home with the kids?
Orlando: Like and have her work?
AW: Mhmm.
Orlando: So have her be like the dominant one?
AW: I don't know.
Orlando: I don't think I could do that.
AW: You don't think you could do it?
Orlando: Like I could, like they're my kids, but I don't think I could just like stay at home for like forever.

As we see here, avoiding interrupting a person is not just a politeness courtesy but also encourages reflexivity in an interview. Once a person believes you are on the same page, further explanation is deemed unnecessary. Summations, like finishing the other person's sentence or expressing agreement like saying "right, right," stop participants from further explanation. Second, and perhaps more importantly, in assuming you already know the point they are making,

you might be wrong about your assumption of what they're going to say.

Member Reflections

The second category of findings is related to member reflections, the process of "sharing and dialoguing with participants about the study's findings, and providing opportunities for questions, critique, feedback, affirmation, and even collaboration" (Tracy, 2010, p. 844). Member reflections typically take place after initial analyses of the data and can be a useful interview strategy for prompting self-reflexivity. Member reflections within the constructed and contested space of an interview may "yield new data which throw fresh light on the investigation and which provide a spur for deeper and richer analyses" (Bloor, 2001, p. 395). In this section, we discuss several techniques of related to member reflections, which we call mirroring, calling out, and reassurance.

Mirroring. Instead of questioning or challenging participants' assertions, which might threaten or further entrench participants' beliefs, mirroring communicates a safe space for participants to articulate their thoughts, even when they may go against norms or the status quo. Simply repeating back to a participant what she or he has said allows the participant to hear what she or he has said as it is expressed by another person.

When Amy asked Orlando if he envisioned his future wife working outside the home, he explained, "I'd rather her be a stay-at-home mom with the kids. So she can spend more time with the kids." Instead of questioning his thinking, Amy repeated his words back to him, "So she can spend more time with kids. Okay." This prompted Orlando to offer further explanation, saying "and that—that's how it is in my family, its traditional . . . the guy works and the mother stays at home." Our interview may not have been the first time Orlando had considered the division of labor he anticipated in his future household, but it may have been the first time he was moved to articulate *why* a traditional household would be important.

Often, it is not until participants have the opportunity to hear themselves talk that they begin to understand what they have previously taken-for-granted or left unquestioned. The interview provides a space of instantaneous sensemaking that provides a unique way of knowing for participants. As Weick (1989) articulates, "how can I know what I think until I see what I say?" (p. 247). Repeating participants' words provides the opportunity for interviewees to be both author and audience—to hear their thoughts and potentially revise them. When Amy asks Orlando if he would consider going against his family's norms and staying at home with his children while his wife worked he says, "I don't think I could do that." In response to the interviewer mirroring,

"You don't think you could do it?" Orlando revised his statement to the following: "Like I could, like they're my kids, but I don't think I could just like stay at home for like forever." Sometimes in hearing their own words echoed back, participants become aware of the discourses they have employed. In this case, Orlando calls up an expectation of fatherhood as provider, which stands in sharp contrast to motherhood and caring for children inside the home. When participants account for the discourses that inform their assumptions, they can begin to comprehend the (undesired) implications of their beliefs and, in turn, begin renegotiating their thoughts on a subject.

Calling out. A strategy we've labeled "calling out" refers to an interviewer pointing out participants' incomplete or developing opinions and explicitly encouraging them to talk through their conflicting beliefs. When Amy asks Lexi what type of job she imagines for her future husband, she explains, "I don't know. As long as it's not something—well, if I really love him, I don't care what he does. Well, of course I'm going to really love him! (*laughs*)." Lexi starts to espouse a particular belief (presumably that men need to have high paying jobs) before catching herself. Lexi's original statement is headed toward a definitive statement, but the talk repair suggests self-interrogation and reflection. Amy notices this uncertainty and calls it out, saying, "But you were about to say, 'as long as it's not' what?" Lexi answers, "As long as it's not something like, just to give an example, working as like the sewage person, as I was saying." This utterance echoes broader beliefs that physically dirty work is stigmatized and low status (Ashforth & Kriener, 1999). In hearing herself espouse a clear view about what she would want for her husband, Lexi was able to reason that loving him would be more important than the status of his work.

In the same way as mirroring or repeating back what a participant has said, calling participants out and requesting they fill in the blanks of their original articulation triggers them to articulate assumptions they may be unaware they are holding. In this window of awareness, they can better interrogate or explain these assumptions, providing alternative narrative futures.

Reassurance. People do not communicate just to convey information, but also to create relationships and be assured that they are lovable, smart, and desirable (Watzlawick, Bavelas, & Jackson, 1967). Interview participants are no different, and must feel safe and comfortable in their beliefs before engaging in any exploration of them. Our empirical materials reveal that participants explored alternative beliefs once the interviewer heard and accepted the beliefs they originally articulated. Upon receiving reassurance about their thoughts and feelings, participants were willing

to explore the complexity of the situations in which they found themselves.

In third author Sarah's interviews with correctional officers, conversations often became intense and reassurance spurred additional insight. In the following example, Sarah provided a vocabulary for her participant to reflect on the difficulties of dealing with contradiction in the workplace. The officer had been discussing how she thinks the public views correctional officers as "goons" but that their job is really difficult.

ST: And I don't think it's just you that's a contra-diction. I think your role is riddled with contradiction.

Lorenzo: Sure, it is, of course. And you know what? That's what I think is so interesting about it is that it *is* riddled with contradiction. I mean, one day we're counselors, the next day we're writing reports on them for what we've over-heard or what they've told us. Or the next day we're beating them up, or, I'm sorry, we're disciplining them, ahh . . .

ST: Getting physical (laughing).

Lorenzo: Right. Yeah, it's a total contradiction. I guess the middle thing is that you find some sort of middle ground. Firm, fair and consistent is something that they [administrators] always wanted to hear you say. They like that. It shows that they don't have some rogue cor-rectional officer and so that's kind of been the standard around the DOC. They like that firm, fair and consistent shit.

Dialogue is facilitated when participants feel accepted rather than defensive. In such a space, they can consider another perspective. In the excerpt above, Sarah's response serves to acknowledge and appreciate the contradiction in their work. Furthermore, she shows humor through laughter in terms of the officer's talk repair after saying that they are "beating up" inmates. One note of caution: There is a fine line between reassurance and problematic formulations that let interviewees off the hook without need to further extrap-olate. The example above is taken near the end of an inter-view and after hours and hours of participant observation with a participant. If it would have been the first time of discussion, it may have been more useful for Sarah to probe and avoid the reassurance.

Reassurance is also illustrated in the following situation in which a correctional officer begins to reflect upon his own role in what appeared to Sarah as a puzzling situation. In an earlier fieldwork session, Sarah had observed various correctional officers deliver food or laundry to inmates through the mini "cut-out" slots of their cells. This particu-lar officer chose to repeatedly slam the slot door back into

place, creating an excruciatingly loud clang that resounded through the entire pod. The little door did not always latch after the first slam so, occasionally, this officer banged the door three to four times. After one such instance, an inmate inside the cell began screaming frantically, "Stop, STOP, *STOP! Why do you do that?*"

Sarah explicitly brought up this situation near the end of an interview with this officer. Initially, the officer appeared reticent and embarrassed that Sarah had noticed this behav-ior. However, she reassured him, saying that she could understand the frustration of working in a prison segrega-tion unit, and how this might be one way of dealing with a desire to feel like he had some power. After this reassur-ance, the officer became quite animated in his reliving of the performance. With a mischievous smile on his face, he said,

> BOOM!! You slam that thing and it's a way to show them to shut up and leave you alone. And it's loud, really loud in there. I've had someone do it to me when I've been inside the cell, and inside those brick walls, and it just reverberates. BOOM!

Furthermore, he explained that officers could use their key if they desired to latch the doors more quietly. However, he shrugged his shoulders and offered, "I don't feel like doing that all the time, especially when inmates are irritating me." Although perhaps counter-intuitive, one way to encourage critical reflection and even transformation is to articulate support for participants and understanding of their point of view, even as they express beliefs and opinions that are ini-tially contrary to the normative beliefs of the critical researcher.

We see this pattern also occurring in the male executives' interview project. About two thirds of the way through one interview, the interviewer asks the participant to comment on research that suggests women off-ramping from the workplace will contribute to a future labor shortage. He asks the participant his thoughts on how improved work-life policies might "soften the blow" of that shortage. The executive's initial response is this:

> A parent needs to be in the home, specifically the mother. There are certain nurturing things that only a mother can give a child. I don't think that, uh, it hurts the workplace at all. I just actually disagree with, with the some of the things that you, that the trend and I, and I disagree because the way society is geared now everything is want, want, want. Consumer debt is at an all time high, it's never been higher.

In this answer, the executive sidesteps and then denies the labor shortage issue brought up by the interviewer, and instead explains how women could easily be full-time homemakers if families just spent less money. So, how might a critical researcher respond? One method would be to say, "You didn't really respond to the question, so I'll

repeat it." However, instead, the interviewer mirrors the participant's response, saying, "So with less consumption, less consumerism, focusing more on the needs rather than the wants, it would be possible for a family to only have one parent work?" With this reassurance, in the following talk turn, we see a very small flicker of transformation in the executive's prevailing script of "women should stay at home." We see this in the form of softening his stance ["every situation is different"] and a talk repair in his final sentence ["I would hope that my wife would, uh, or myself, would always . . . "] as illustrated in the following excerpt:

> If you take a parent, there's a lot of things that when a parent's home can cut back. A lot of things so, each situation is different. I would hope that my wife would, uh, or myself, would always be able to be with our kids and raise them all. I want them learning either my wife or me, I don't want 'em learning from a day care center.

Some might view his softened stance as merely being politically correct. However, his talk repair ("my wife would, uh, or myself") also indicates a revision in his script. The interview may be the first time he has ever discussed work-life balance, and he may not even be consciously aware of the scripts that are guiding his action. A talk repair such as this illustrates increased cognitive activity, uncertainty, and a discursive space in flux (Erard, 2007; Tracy & Rivera, 2010).

Counterfactual Prompting

A third category for dialogic interviewing relates to prompting the participant to imagine the world in ways different than their originally articulated perspective. In each of the counterfactual prompting strategies that follow: Imagining the opposite, magic wand questions, and empathic consideration, participants are given space to narratively tinker with another perspective, without the threat of having to ascribe to that other perspective. Often, just by talking through another way of being in the world, participants become sympathetic to a new perspective or, at the very least, develop a greater understanding of it.

Imagining the opposite. In Amy's interviews with youth, she would ask them to imagine the opposite of the beliefs they had previously espoused, in an attempt to turn their assumptions on their heads. So for participants who claimed they would work outside the home while their wives stayed at home to care for children, she would ask them to consider the opposite arrangement:

AW: Would you ever stay at home with the kids?
Orlando: Like and have her work?
AW: Mhmm.

Orlando: So have her be like the dominant one?
AW: I don't know?
Orlando: I don't think I could do that.

When asked why not, Orlando explained that being the parent who stayed home to care for children would feel like being trapped. By putting himself in his future wife's shoes, he was able to see some of the drawbacks he may not have previously considered. Likewise, in the male voices project, the interviewer asks the executive if someone like his most successful female employee would be a good future romantic partner for his son, an idea that the executive resists:

> Uh yeah, I don't, I don't know that, then, for being as successful, um, as my son, I don't know that, that, I think that would be almost anti um helpful to, to, to my son's career if I think somebody has, you know, so dedicated and away from him.

The interviewer then pushes the executive to consider the benefits of having a successful wife. His response demonstrates a small flicker of transformation:

INT: Okay, are there any ways in which that it, it [a career successful wife] would be a good idea?
B: Well on the, on the, no is the answer to that, but on the flip side of that is that if, if she's as successful as well and it, it takes stress off of, off of his life or providing for a family then I think that that would also be helpful. Maybe in a different sense.

For Lexi, who expressed a desire to minimize her work outside of the home in order to care for her future children, Amy asked her to imagine the opposite scenario.

AW: Yeah. What if he wants to stay home with the kids?
Lexi: I'd say no!
AW: Why?
Lexi: 'Cause I want to raise the kids. I want to stay with them a lot and teach them academics and teach them their ABC's and be like a teacher for them at home, so when they get home I can help them with their homework. I wouldn't have him do that just because . . . I guess if it was an option, we could do it together, raise them at home (*laughs*). And I just . . . to me it seems like the guy always works and the mom stays home with the kids.

In prompting the opposite, Lexi engages in her own sort of deconstruction (Derrida, 1982), which then serves as an illumination of her own script. By replacing her image of herself as primary caregiver with her husband, she reveals the limitations of a discourse in which fatherhood in the public sphere and motherhood in the private sphere are

strictly divided. In this way her deconstruction draws attention to what is absent in such a discourse of fatherhood, like taking an active role in caring for children.

From our data, an important component of counterfactual prompting is identifying and asking about specific alternatives to current beliefs. For example, in Amy's interviews with youth, she would often prompt them to imagine themselves in 10 years and ask "What does your life look like?" The goal was to encourage reflection on work and family beliefs, but answers were often quite vague. It was only when Amy articulated a specific alternative to their espoused beliefs that they were able to meaningfully engage in any sort of counterfactual exercise. Just as writers, photographers, and improvisational comedians are spurred to creativity when prompted with constraints in the form of topic ideas (e.g., "most embarrassing moment"), specific counterfactual prompts spur creativity and novel answers from interviewees.

Magic wand questions. A second technique for engaging participants in counterfactual thinking is to ask participants to articulate what they would do if they had a magic wand and could change anything about their current situation. This technique allows participants to ignore real or imagined constraints and think outside immediate considerations. Similar to the "wildest idea" brainstorming approach (Sun-Wolf, 2002), in which participants abandon rationality and logic to come up with the most out-of-the box ideas, the magic wand technique asks participants to playfully disregard current norms, limitations, and expectations. In her interviews examining organizational responses to work-life issues, male executives imagined how things might be different.

INT: For those employees that are trying to do both be you know good parents and be good employees, *if you had a magic wand* and could just change the way the world works, what are some things that you would do in the workplace to make that easier for people to negotiate or balance the two? (2 sec) Like if it was up to you to solve the problems of the world, what would you say should be done?

Bill: Well you could have day care that was right in your building so to speak . . . we had a day care that was right, not in the building, but right adjacent to the building. So the kids could be brought there after school and the moms could just walk out the door and pick them up and off they'd go to home. That was a tremendous asset for, for those moms, uh, (1 sec) or dads.

This magic wand question technique allowed the executive to imagine a work-life solution free of his workplace's current practices (earlier in the interview, he suggested employees use sick time to take care of child emergencies). Handed this linguistic magic wand, the participant magically broke free of the social norms that otherwise guided his thinking—if only for an instant. He even began to question the assumption that only mothers would be picking up children after work and said that workplace day care could also be "a tremendous asset for, for those moms, uh, or dads."

Empathic consideration. A third counterfactual technique is empathic consideration, which asks participants to go beyond imagination to compassionately considering what someone in a different position might experience. Empathic consideration can be spurred by a focused question about the challenges of someone holding an opposing perspective. This approach can prompt the participant to identify and relate with the "other's" situation—a key component in compassion (D. Way & Tracy, 2012). In Orlando's case, Amy asked him to consider the perspective of his future wife, who he expected to stay at home as a primary caregiver.

AW: Yeah. What do you think some of the challenges are staying at home?

Orlando: Um changing diapers? No, it's just like feeling like in your house like locked up because you have our kids and you can't go—You can't do anything, but . . .

Asking him to imagine the challenges of being the primary caregiver prompted him to realize it might not be such a desirable position. After being asked to think more about the challenges, he mused about how staying home full-time could feel like you were imprisoned.

Conclusion

Our goal in this article was to analyze interactional practices associated with flickers of transformation in dialogic interviewing. As a result of our analysis, we offer the following typology (Table 1) of related strategies and techniques. The process of engaging in dialogue is far more complex than the typology presented here. That said, we hope that identifying and clarifying these strategies may be valuable to other researchers as they practice a dialogic approach to interviewing.

For interviewers who wish to implement the self-reflective, dialogic framework outlined in this article, we offer some suggestions. First, interviewers should adopt a stance of curiosity with participants, rather than contention or combativeness. From a dialogic perspective, participants are allies who offer perspectives that enhance and enrich data and should be addressed as such. Second, a dialogic approach requires time and trust. As interviewers we were able to push and question participants because of the months spent in our sites and the relationships built with our

Table 1. Interactional Strategies That Accompany Participant Self-Reflexivity.

Strategies and tactics	Examples
Probing questions	"Why?" or "Why not?"
Opinions	"Why do you think that is?"
Beliefs	"What do you think?"
Resisting problematic formulations	Avoiding finishing participants' sentences
Member reflections	Repeating participant's words back to them
Mirroring	"You were about to say . . . ?"
Calling out	Expressing understanding of/agreement with participants opinion/point of view
Reassurance	
Counterfactual prompting	"If you had a magic wand, what would you change about the situation?"
Magic wand	"Can you imagine what it might be like . . . ?"
Imagining opposite	"What might be the advantages/disadvantages of such a perspective?"
Empathic consideration	"What might be the benefits/challenges for that person?"

participants. Those interested in taking a dialogic approach should work to develop trust with participants either through extended time in a site or a carefully crafted interview guide that first develops a climate of mutual trust and respect. An awareness of the ways one embodies "interviewer" can also help the participant to feel safe and open. To that end, consider conducting the interview one-on-one in a space where participants feel comfortable and are not concerned with being overheard. Work to minimize physical and psychological distance by dressing similarly to participants, eliminating physical barriers and power distances, and avoiding paying too much attention to notes and recording devices. Third, develop a feel for your participants and trust your instincts about when to engage in dialogic interviewing. We did not purposefully or intentionally engage in the strategies identified in this article, and do not know what the outcome would be if we had. Nor do we know the effectiveness of the practices analyzed in this article if the entire interview was saturated with these techniques. It may be that one of the reasons that participants came to reflecting upon and moving their meaning was that, for the majority of the interview, they did not feel pushed.

Finally, researchers should remember the process of engaging in dialogic interviewing is far more productive and important than any particular outcome. The strategies and tactics discussed herein are not empirical proof that the tactics cause transformation. Interviewers should not expect a shift in participants' attitudes and beliefs or expect them to arrive at any particular way of thinking. In addition, interviewers should only adopt a dialogic approach with a willingness to question and challenge their own assumptions and be prepared to end up entertaining different beliefs than those with which they started.

In many ways this article represents the process of reflexivity and transformation in our own thinking and highlights the importance of writing and presenting ideas as a way of knowing. In hearing ourselves, as authors, publically talk through the ideas from this article at a conference we came to understand how some of our original framing was not wholly representative of the ideas we had intended to communicate. We realized a need for highlighting the exploratory nature of this study and the need to reiterate the importance of these flickers even if we cannot know, empirically, whether they trigger a complete or stable transformation in participants.

As qualitative scholars, we embrace the notion that the interview is not "a mirror of the so-called external world, nor is it a window into the inner life of the person," but is rather "a way of writing the world, a way of bringing the world into play" (Denzin, 2001, p. 24). A dialogic approach can function as a rich source of data and a meaningful intervention by creating a safe space for participants to hear themselves articulate their beliefs, recognize when those beliefs are undesirable, and work toward self-questioning and change. Genuine engagement requires that researchers dig into unquestioned assumptions (e.g., through probing questions, counterfactual prompting) and then leave room for participants to explore those questions themselves (e.g., by avoiding problematic formulations and encouraging member reflections). The development of a safe space for self-reflexivity is crucial, as an abundance of research has shown that providing corrected information or engaging in rational argument is likely to reinforce participants' attitudes against change (Kahan, Peters, Dawson, & Slovic, 2013; Rollnick, 2002).

The strategies presented in this article represent a dialogic approach, rather than a checklist for critical interviewing. By creating a space for participants to unpack their assumptions, researchers are able to gain insight into the process by which individuals create and question meaning. Cunliffe (2009) reminds us, "being 'critical' and changing practices, structures, or systems, occurs from within, and

not necessarily because of an external critique . . . easily rationalize[d] as being irrelevant or mistaken" (p. 93). In addition, dialogic interviewing allows interviewers to delve beyond the interpersonal interaction to access the contributing discourses that shape beliefs. Rather than treating participants as sources of information, a dialogic approach encourages researchers to engage with participants as people with complicated and developing worldviews.

References

Ashforth, B. E., & Kriener, G. E. (1999). "How can you do it?": Dirty work and the challenge of constructing a positive identity. *Academy of Management Review*, *24*, 413-434. doi:10.5465/AMR.1999.2202129

Barge, J. K. (2002). Enlarging the meaning of group deliberation: From discussion to dialogue. In L. R. Frey (Eds.), *New directions in group communication* (pp. 159-177). London, England: SAGE.

Bloor, M. (2001). Techniques of validation in qualitative research: A critical commentary. In R. M. Emerson (Ed.), *Contemporary field research* (pp. 383-396). Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.

Boler, M. (1999). *Feeling power: Emotions and education*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Buber, M. (1958). *I and thou*. New York, NY: Scribner.

Corman, S., Trethewey, A., & Goodall, H. L. Jr. (2007). *A 21st century model for communication in the global war of ideas: From simplistic influence to pragmatic complexity*. Consortium for Strategic Communication. Retrieved from http://csc.asu.edu/wp-content/uploads/pdf/114.pdf

Cunliffe, A. L. (2003). Reflexive inquiry in organizational research: Questions and possibilities. *Human Relations*, *56*, 983-1003. doi:0.1177/00187267030568004

Cunliffe, A. L. (2009). The philosopher leader: On relationalism, ethics and reflexivity—A critical perspective to teaching leadership. *Management Learning*, *40*, 87-101. doi:10.1177/1350507608099315

Denzin, N. K. (2001). The reflexive interview and a performative social science. *Qualitative Research*, *1*, 23-46. doi:10.1177/146879410100100102

Derrida, J. (1982). *Margins of philosophy* (A. Bass, Trans.). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. (Original work published 1972)

Erard, M. (2007). *Um . . .: Slips, stumbles, and verbal blunders and what they mean*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.

Flecha, A., Pulido, C., & Christou, M. (2011). Transforming violent selves through reflection in critical communicative

research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *17*, 246-255. doi:10.1177/1077800410397803

Giddens, A. (1979). *Central problems in social theory*. London, England: Macmillan.

Gómez, A., Puigvert, L., & Flecha, R. (2011). Critical communicative methodology: Informing real social transformation through research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *17*, 235-245. doi:10.1177/1077800410397802

Grossberg, L. (1982). Does communication theory need intersubjectivity? Toward an immanent philosophy of interpersonal relations. In M. Burgoon (Ed.), *Communication yearbook 5* (pp. 171-205). Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE.

Gubrium, J. F., & Holstein, J. A. (2003). *Postmodern interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Holstein, J., & Gubrium, J. (1997). Active interviewing. In D. Silverman (Ed.), *Qualitative research: Theory, method and practice* (pp. 140-161). London, England: SAGE.

Hyde, B., & Bineham, J. L. (2000). From debate to dialogue: Toward a pedagogy of nonpolarized public discourse. *The Southern Communication Journal*, *65*, 208-223. doi:10.1080/10417940009373168

Johannessen, R. L. (1971). The emerging concept of communication as dialogue. *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, *57*, 373-382. doi:10.1080/00335637109383082

Kahan, D. M., Peters, E., Dawson, E. C., & Slovic, P. (2013, September). *Motivated numeracy and enlightened self-government* (Yale Law School, Public Law Working Paper 307). Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2319992

Kemmis, S., & McTaggart, R. (2000). Participatory action research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 567-605). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Lindlof, T. R., & Taylor, B. C. (2002). *Qualitative communication research methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Ozanne, J. L., & Saatcioglu, B. (2008). Participatory action research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *35*, 423-439. doi:10.1086/586911

Rollnick, M. (2002). *Motivational interviewing*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Roulston, K., deMarrais, K., & Lewis, J. B. (2003). Learning to interview in the social sciences. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *9*, 643-668. doi:10.1177/1077800403252736

Russell, G. M., & Kelly, N. H. (2002). Research as interacting dialogic processes: Implications for reflexivity. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *3*(3). Retrieved from http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/831/1807

Starbuck, W. H., & Milliken, F. J. (1988). Executives' perceptual filters: What they notice and how they make sense. In D.C. Hambrick (Ed.), *The executive effect: Concepts and methods for studying top managers* (pp. 35–65). Greenwich, CT: JAI.

Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.

SunWolf. (2002). Getting to "Groupaha!": Provoking creative processes in task groups. In L. R. Frey (Ed.), *New directions in group communication* (pp. 203-218). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Tracy, S. J. (2005). Locking up emotion: Moving beyond dissonance for understanding emotion labor discomfort. *Communication Monographs*, *72*, 261-283. doi:10.1080/03637750500206474

Tracy, S. J. (2010). Qualitative quality: Eight "big-tent" criteria for excellent qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *16*, 837-851. doi:10.1177/1077800410383121

Tracy, S. J. (2013). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.

Tracy, S. J., & Rivera, K. D. (2010). Endorsing equity and applauding stay-at-home moms: How male voices on work-life reveal aversive sexism and flickers of transformation. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *24*, 13-43. doi:10.1177/0893318909352248

Tracy, S. J., & Trethewey, A. (2005). Fracturing the real-self ↔ fake self dichotomy: Moving toward "crystallized" organizational discourses and identities. *Communication Theory*, *15*, 168-195. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2885.2005.tb00331.x

Watzlawick, P., Bavelas, J. B., & Jackson, D. D. (1967). *Pragmatics of human communication*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton.

Way, A. K. (2012). *Apprentices & worker bees: Discursive constructions of youth's work identity* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ.

Way, D., & Tracy, S. J. (2012). Conceptualizing compassion as recognizing, relating and (re)acting: A qualitative study of compassionate communication at hospice. *Communication Monographs*, *79*, 292-315. doi:10.1080/03637751.2012.697630

Weick, K. E. (1989). Organized improvisation: 20 years of organizing. *Communication Studies*, *40*, 241-248. doi:10.1080/10510978909368277

Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Wogelmuth, J. R., & Donohue, R. (2006). Toward an inquiry of discomfort: Guiding transformation in "emancipatory" narrative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *12*, 1022-1039. doi:10.1177/1077800406288629

Author Biographies

Amy K. Way (PhD, Arizona State University) is an assistant professor in the Department of Communication at Villanova University. She draws upon critical and feminist theory to inform community-engaged qualitative research on the organization of youth identities, specifically in regard to worker identity and work-life issues.

Robin Kanak Zwier, MA, is a graduate of the communication program at Villanova University. Her research interests include health and medicine, social change, and social identity.

Sarah J. Tracy (PhD, University of Colorado-Boulder) is a professor and director of The Project for Wellness and Work-Life in the Hugh Downs School of Human Communication at Arizona State University–Tempe. She is author of two books and more than 60 manuscripts on topics related to qualitative research methods, organizational communication, and emotion.