

ONLINE APPENDIX 2: CLINICAL INTERVIEWING

Clinical interviewing is a way of entering the subjective world of another person in order to observe thoughts, feelings, and behavior. Commonly used to diagnose and treat mental health problems, it is a method of talking that can also be used in research with a nonclinical population. In the research reported in this book, clinical interviewing revealed how research participants looked at and experienced their lives, how happy they were, how their happiness and worldview developed over time, and how competitive success and other factors figured into this development. This appendix first describes how clinical interviewing made these contributions, noting points of comparison with survey research, and then describes the clinical interviewing strategies used in the research.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF CLINICAL INTERVIEWING

Clinical interviewing generated an expansive picture of how participants understood their lives and happiness, much more extensive than is possible to achieve with survey self-reports. This picture was obtained not only by a broad research protocol but also by a supportive context for data collection that included a trusted space and time for reflection, a skilled listener, encouragement, and thoughtful probes. These conditions helped bring to light material with significant consequence in the participant's life that would not have been considered or reported in the solitude of completing a survey.

Further, clinical interviewing introduced flexibility and breadth to the research process which deepened concepts and explanatory models generated by the research. In survey research, measures and hypotheses are predetermined—they are decided on before data are collected. In contrast, clinical interviews followed by grounded theory enabled the winnowing of a broad range of possibilities to those that best fit the data and that most fully addressed the research question. In this way, a particular

formulation of well-being, a corresponding measure, and explanatory models were derived in grounded theory during the research process.

Clinical interviewing deepened understanding of the construct of interest—happiness—for additional reasons. As noted by Schwarz and Strack (1999), individuals rarely retrieve all the information that may be relevant to a judgment asked for by survey questions about their happiness. Chapter 9 showed how this limitation affected participant responses to the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). The scale's questions demand a review and assessment of large periods and domains of life that exceed what is reasonable to expect an individual to carry out in the brief period allotted. Such a heavy demand can induce a situation of cognitive overload. As Schwarz and Strack note, in such situations a respondent generates judgments based on currently available information and is forced to take shortcuts when selecting answer choices. Because the participant's review and assessment are invisible to the researcher, the researcher is not privy to what information is available and what shortcuts the individual is taking. By contrast, the study's clinical interviews observed the review and the judgment processes that informed a participant's view of his life and happiness. These efforts were part of the research rather than beyond its scope.

Indeed, it was not uncommon for the interviewer to observe important aspects of experience unrecognized by the participant but revealed by his anecdotes or comments. Filtering restricted some participants' awareness of their experiences, even though their communication leaked them out. Leakage, as it was called in the book, went undetected in survey self-reports. Leakage deepened the book's account.

Finally, clinical interviewing enabled the use of psychobiographical sketches of representative participants to illustrate core constructs and findings. Similar illustration would not have been possible using survey evidence, because variables have limited descriptive value and do not conjure up a life.

TECHNIQUES OF CLINICAL INTERVIEWING

The general strategy of clinical interviewing in both eras of the study was to get to know participants and their lives as well as possible, focusing on features of person and environment influencing past and present development. College interviews, shorter and more numerous than adult interviews (see book appendix 3 for roster of interviews), tracked development as it unfolded over the four years (more or less) of the participant's college career, whereas adult interviews were conducted as a life review over a week or more. Many techniques were shared in how interviews were conducted. Here I focus primarily on strategies I employed in adult interviews, noting overlap and some differences with college strategies based on my reading of the archival data set.

Interview questions for the late midlife follow-up, shown in online appendix 1, were developed and refined in consultation with research literature on midlife and aging and scholars and clinicians knowledgeable about the population. The questions were also informed by pilot research testing questions and methods, review of college archival data to identify topics inviting longitudinal comparison, and my own experience as a clinician and informant in the community.

Five specific strategies were employed in clinical interviewing.

First, establishing rapport and a comfortable environment for a wide-ranging personal conversation was a priority and was fostered in multiple ways. Interviews were conducted in person in both eras of the study. The college interviews were conducted in the offices of the Harvard Student Study on campus. For the follow-up, I flew to wherever a participant lived and met him in his home or office, whichever he preferred, at times of his choosing. Half of adult participants chose each venue. I traveled to twenty-five cities in the United States, in many cases multiple times to accommodate participants' schedules. The intensity of the method and amount of exposure in both eras helped to foster bonds between interviewer and participant.

The effort and expense to carry out face-to-face interviews were incurred with a particular understanding in the adult era, mirroring the understanding that appears in evidence in the college interviews. Even if a participant granted formal permission to be interviewed, he might not be complicit with the interview and share sensitive information about himself if the environment did not strongly cultivate a sense of trust and rapport. Large swaths of the participant's experiences and internal states may not have been volunteered to the interviewer or may not have been accessible, even to him. Self-censorship could be unintentional and unrecognized. Face-to-face interviews in adulthood helped renew and maintain the personal relationship with participants established in face-to-face interviews in college.

Second, interviews were carried out with an effort to engage personal motivations for participating in the interviews rather than positioning the interaction mainly as an impersonal scientific exchange. This approach diverges from the goals and ethos of much research, even other kinds of interviewing. Interviews were offered as opportunities for discovery not only for the interviewer but also for the interviewee. Once interviews were under way, many participants discovered the opportunity to understand, connect with, expand, alter, or otherwise act upon their own lives or understanding of their lives. (This discovery was part of an overall posture of concern for the well-being of participants conveyed by the college study staff and likely helps explain why numerous participants approached interviewers requesting help with personal problems.) Most people do not often encounter the opportunity to have such experience with a professional listener. This feature offered powerful benefits to the research. Without such a real possibility for the data collection task to benefit the participant, essential motivation would have been absent for the participant, and the quality of insight would have been diminished from the point of view of both the participant and the interviewer. From a frame of empathic engagement with real-life concerns of the participant, the research was able to garner insight into what mattered to the person. He was an ally—with highly active personal motivations—rather than a passive respondent in an impersonal task.

Third, the interviews were carried out with an effort to allow the participant, rather than the interviewer, to establish the structure of understanding and reporting his experiences and the way in which he reflected on them. Like the aforementioned departure from the ethos of formal scientific exchange, this effort inverted the strategy of many interview approaches by prescribing that the interview protocol of questions be disregarded whenever possible. In adult interviews the participant was invited to begin talking about his life, and in college the participant was invited to talk about his recent experiences since the previous interview in whatever way occurred to him. The adult interviews would begin after I answered participants' questions and queried their recollections of the college study; I would then ask an open-ended question such as "What have you been doing since college?" Discussions took on a conversational quality with the participant doing the vast majority of the speaking. The adult protocol's function was to explore areas after the participant already had spoken at length filling in a picture of what he knew. The protocol served to query aspects of his experiences to ensure completeness and a fuller understanding of their meaning. In college the interviewer guided the conversation to topics of interest, such as social experiences, courses, events, and family (see topics in book appendix 3), after learning about recent developments in the participant's life. Open-ended questions also helped in both eras, when needed, to avert social anxiety when participants felt they didn't know what to say.

This strategy of data collection is distinctly different from survey self-reports in that it does not ask the participant to carry alone the heavy cognitive load of reviewing his experiences, and further, to summarize and to locate them within a predetermined format of answer choices. The interviewer sat with the participant as he reviewed his experiences, held the unfolding account, and queried as needed. Rather than providing words and predefined categories for the participant to relate to, the interviewer teased out the participant's categories, formulations, and language in describing experiences and adhered to them as a collaborator in discerning the picture of his life and experiences.

Fourth, the unusual length of interviews—and in the college era their span of years—elicited deeper understanding. Rather than imposing limitations on the participant, the interview encouraged more reflection and more elaboration in any area. Saturation, a standard used to determine that a participant's interviews were complete, was the point in interviews when the interviewee felt understood and the interviewer and interviewee agreed that the conversations had reviewed all relevant areas and that new questions were eliciting redundant responses that added little new understanding. Such thoroughness more vividly revealed themes and patterns and offered occasion to rule out competing hypotheses. For the interviewer, the point of saturation indicates that the interviews have produced a data record that can substantially answer the research question in the case of the participant.

The adult interviews reached saturation when areas on the protocol and others raised by the participant during the interviews had been explored sufficiently for the interviewer to paraphrase the historical progression of the participant's life, including central experiences, themes, and participant assessments. The participant confirmed that understanding was complete and that further conversation would add little. College interviews reached saturation of topics of interest using similar methods of paraphrasing and testing completeness of understanding with participants. College interviews on the whole amassed broad coverage of the participant's past and present development, demonstrating utility as a comprehensive baseline understanding of the participant and his life that could be used in the follow-up.

Literal and Nonliteral Levels of Inquiry

The topical areas of the interviews were not the only level of inquiry. An equally important aspect of the interviews, a fifth strategy embedded in the approach, was an exploration of additional material conveyed by the participant but not stated, material of which the participant was not necessarily aware. This strategy was used in both eras but some differences exist, which I note. In both eras this material included emotional and cognitive patterns; how the participant interacted with the interviewer; features of the environment; and meanings invested in art, dreams, and current concerns. Exploration of this material

comprised what was effectively a nonliteral interview being conducted concurrently with the literal interview. In adulthood some components of this level of inquiry were more developed and explicitly part of the design of interviews than appear in the college data record.

The nonliteral interview in adulthood explored the range, intensity, and frequency of central emotions the participant experienced in his life, revealing the participant's emotional register. Mapping this register out over the course of the interviews generated a context for understanding any given experience or group of experiences. It revealed what experiences were understood as positive or negative in relation to the participant's overall emotional experience. It was not possible to understand the meaning of any experience without understanding the emotions associated with it, and without understanding the broader context of the emotional register.

Strong emotions on display pointed to the participant's emotional investments. They revealed events, situations, relationships, and aspects of life discussed in the literal interview in which positive and negative emotions were most strongly felt. These investments served as a link between the literal interview and emotional material.

The college interviewers appeared to be quite familiar with what I am calling the emotional register but they did not systematically pursue it. Following participants over many years across many situations during college and exploring experiences during many interviews enabled features of the emotional register to appear spontaneously without requiring deliberate examination, as did the time-constrained life review in adulthood.

Another aspect of the nonliteral interview was exploration of unacknowledged transitions in thought that the participant showed in the conversation. These too led to observations about emotional investments, and also to other features of the participant's understanding of his life. Transitions revealed how a participant associated experiences, at times even apparently disparate ones. Similarities and contrasts between the linked experiences—across time, across relationships, across contexts, as

examples—were implied by these transitions and became a topic to be explored. A participant might, for example, spontaneously talk about an earlier situation in his career in a different role and with different colleagues from the one under discussion. Or, even more disparate, a participant might recall a childhood experience with a sibling after talking about a painful adult experience at work. These are two of millions of possibilities. The approach to interviewing recognized these linkages as patterns in thought that served multiple functions. Sometimes they revealed how a participant handled painful experiences, by changing the focus of the conversation to a more tolerable or positive topic in an effort to regulate affect or to manage self-presentation. In changing focus, a participant revealed emotional contrasts between the experiences he switched away from and those he switched to. Sometimes linkages revealed how a participant recognized similarity of emotional meaning across experiences by traversing in thought from one experience to a distant one connected by a shared emotional theme. College participants as commonly as adults displayed such transitions in thought, and college interviewers not infrequently artfully explored their emotional meaning.

Serving another function in the adult interviews, transitions in thought helped reveal the participant's categories for organizing experiences—his personal filing system. Socially defined categories such as work, marriage, and family, often presumed in survey queries to be shared by members of a sample, may not be. A socially defined category may not have formed into an important area for an individual or may be subsumed into other personally defined categories of understanding. For example, a participant might spontaneously switch to talking about assistance he offered boys in a disadvantaged community after talking about mentoring young entrants to his field, echoing statements he made at other times that being “a good person” is important to him; these activities in the community and at work may well be understood in his personal filing system as related more centrally to the aspiration to be a good person than as being defined as part of work or community involvement. By following the participant's transitions in thought and how they related to his synthesis of experiences, the clinical life history interview could observe the categories that had evolved in his understanding. These observations

provided further context for understanding any given experience and for understanding what areas of life were most important and how the participant felt about them. College interviews, not focused on conducting a life review, did not appear to explore transitions for how they might shed light on the participant's organizing categories.

The sensitivity to each participant's filing system—his cognitive map for organizing experience—led the adult study in grounded theory to recognize across participants common features of personal understanding. These features would become the identity story described in chapter 5, comprised of categories of attribution (to important situations and events, important others, oneself, and the world at large), central strivings (central goals and values), and central affective themes inhering in this story. By seeing this personal organization of experience for a participant, the interviews recognized the literal and nonliteral aspects of conveyed experience figuring into each of these categories, his strivings, and the story's central affective themes. It pieced together a picture of these parts in relation to the whole. The picture was the participant's worldview and well-being.

A participant's behavior interacting with the interviewer and the interview situation offered additional data in the nonliteral interview. By retaining a consistent posture and approach to interviewing across participants, it was possible for the interviewer to detect things that stood out for a given participant. These things might appear in apparently trivial matters of scheduling or small talk at the beginning or end of interviews, questions asked or requests made of the interviewer, interest in aspects of the interviewer's life or disinterest in the interviewer, and the kind of relationship the participant seemed to enact with the interviewer. These things sometimes helped to illuminate aspects of the participant's account of experiences outside of the interview, such as reactions from others and the history of his relationships. College interviews also employed these kinds of data in understanding participants.

The physical and social environment in which the interviews took place also offered potential data to consider. For example, the adult interviews would ask about family members, work colleagues, or

others the participant interacted with in the presence of the interviewer before or after an interview. These people were in the environment. The interviews would also ask about inanimate objects in the environment, such as art, photographs, books, and religious objects in the home or office, or features of the neighborhood, community, or city where the participant was located. These topics were not literally about the participant's life history but sometimes helped to elicit insight or led to relevant material in his life history. Similarly, the college interviews naturally explored people, activities, structures, and other artifacts of the environment of Harvard College in which participants were located, and how participants related to them. This was part of understanding person and environment in development.

The nonliteral interview also invited the participant to discuss symbolic beliefs, attributions, attitudes, and understandings such as about film, literature, photographs, music, and any form of art that he had experienced or produced; dreams he had had; anecdotes, current events, the concerns of other people he knew and understood. One of the last segments of the adult interview presented a series of pictures of interpersonal scenes and asked participants to tell a story about what was going on. Called the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) (Murray, 1943), this part of the interview was not formally scored or interpreted but rather understood as an extension of the interview. It functioned as another set of prompts that sometimes suggested insights or provided leads to important aspects of the participant's life, as a participant's description of a photograph on the participant's wall sometimes did. For consistency, the same TAT images were given to participants in adulthood as TAT cards administered on several occasions during college.

The interview protocol thus offered only a partial map of what transpired in the interviews. It identified potential topics thought in advance to be of interest, the kinds of open-ended questions that might be asked, and the general progression of subject matter in areas that might guide the interview. Participants often addressed many of these topics and questions in their own narrative progression without prompting. The goal of the literal interview was to elicit as much information and reflection about

facets of the participant's life as possible—that is, to achieve coverage. Multiple interviews allowed for depth and range and for observation of shifts in the participant's perspective from one discussion to the next.

The emphasis on the nonliteral interview in adulthood was particularly important to the objective of obtaining a sound picture of the participant's life history and well-being. The nonliteral interview helped to work around problems that could have confounded interpretation. It pointed to significant commitments and understandings often not fully recognized by the participant in his literal account. This part of the interview was carried out with a light footprint, noting questions and topics to be explored as they arose in the progression of the interviews, waiting until late in the interviews to ask about them. When the discussion turned to these topics and questions, I sought to test that I had perceived correctly their presence and their meaning. I asked about these patterns with care, since they had not been volunteered with clear intention to do so. For example, with one participant who had an early religious upbringing and was no longer religiously active, I had detected that he still held profound feelings from that time that defined his central life goals, and I asked about them. With one frenetically active participant, I asked what motivated him to be so heavily involved in extracurricular commitments, suspecting a link with trauma. Often with these queries I received confirmation of my hypotheses. Sometimes I was corrected persuasively. But at other times I encountered unpersuasive rejections of what I thought had been clearly conveyed. In these instances I suspected that I had reached the limit of what could be discussed productively with the participant.

I was helped in making sense of unpersuasive rejections by asking the participant near the end of interviews how he coped with adversity. I wanted to test my understanding of the affect regulation strategies the participant used, while at the same time testing the participant's self-awareness. Answers to this query helped confirm that I had recognized the moments of greatest hardship in his life and how he dealt with each, and also illuminated coping strategies I observed in the interview. Often, coping

strategies in life mirrored those on display in the interview. I could consider whether the unpersuasive rejection of the pattern or theme I had observed was an example of filtering. This query also helped the research team later reach its own assessment.

The literal and nonliteral interviews combined yielded a more complete picture of the participant's life than a literal interview would have alone. They produced an integrated life history seen from the participant's vantage point, incorporating evidence unstated but shown.

College interviewers, although giving less emphasis to some elements, were attuned to similar nonliteral data in gaining understanding of the topical areas of concern and in accruing across time a rigorous understanding of the individual and his development. They did not share the adult interviewer's concern with discerning the personal filing system for organizing life experiences and the emotional register within the constraints of a time-limited life review. Nonetheless, their exposure to participants over time and the volume of their interviews displayed these aspects of participants' lives.

Synthesis in Adult Interviews

A description of the shape and synthesis strategies of the adult interviews rounds out the description of the approach to the adult clinical interviews. The adult interviews, as a life review, employed specific strategies for integrating an understanding of the participant's life as a whole. The shape of the adult interviews progressed from a widely cast net to achieve coverage to deeper exploration of important areas and experiences, to paraphrasing and synthesis of each of these areas and experiences, to exploration of affective and cognitive patterns flagged earlier, and eventually to paraphrasing and synthesis into an overall life history. The overall synthesis phase of the interviews served to refine and confirm the picture of the participant's life that had emerged.

This approach employed several strategies for asking participants to produce summary judgments. First, it asked directly which aspects of his life he felt proudest and least proud of, most

impactful and least impactful in. These questions helped the participant bring together the variety of important experiences and areas that had already been reviewed in depth individually and recognize, if not already articulated, how he felt about them overall. Second, the participant was asked to identify people who had had the most impact on him and how each person would assess his life. These people were often parents, teachers, or bosses, who had been discussed earlier; infrequently, new figures would emerge. By asking how these significant figures would assess the participant's life, the interview was asking for key internal standards and values the participant used to judge his life, for how the participant saw his life measuring up in relation to these standards, not only how his life measured up in the eyes of important others. Standards and values had been internalized from these formative relationships and, indeed, were often vivid in the participant's life evaluations before he described them as belonging to important others' evaluations of his life. A third strategy was to ask the participant to think about lessons from his life that he would give (and may in fact have given) to his children, a young person, and a Harvard graduate starting out in life. These vantage points elicited how the participant related to his experiences overall. A final strategy asked the participant to consider his legacy: how he hoped to be remembered and how he thought he would be remembered (and by whom).

These synthesis questions elicited answers that were often predictable from earlier parts of the interviews, and repetitive with each other, but a participant's responses to them confirmed that I had a clear understanding of the participant's summative evaluation of his successes and shortfalls in realizing fundamental goals and aspirations. Responses also confirmed a clear understanding of goals and aspirations themselves, patterned in the narrative across areas of life and time periods in the participant's history.

Although I describe as distinct the literal and nonliteral interviews and the phases in the progression of adult interviews, for most participants, these dimensions of interviews were woven together and elements from each emerged often concurrently and in unpredictable ways. Advancing the

multiple goals of the interviews was therefore a manifest concern. It required mindfulness about what was transpiring, careful note keeping during interviews, reviews of past interviews before starting a new one, listing and relisting open questions and issues to be explored, and following the participant's narrative until it led to an appropriate time to explore open questions.

In spite of their unpredictability, the adult interviews captured an understanding of the participant's life by adhering to a key principle. They built a story of what mattered in the participant's life and history from the ground up, starting with more specificity and range of experiences and themes and working to more generality and to essential experiences and themes. Waiting until late in discussion of a given area of experience and in the interviews overall to ask summative questions prevented the depth and variety of specific, contextualized experiences and recollections from being crowded out. It averted the participant's glossing over detail and richness or fitting his account into top-down perspective.

At the end of interviews I asked the participant to comment on the interview experience, any important aspects needing expression or revision, whether he felt I understood him, and how I had carried out the interviews. Because the interviews were exhaustive, many participants confirmed my sense that we had reached saturation. Sometimes helpful refinements were offered. Commonly, participants described the experience of being interviewed as a profound and uncommon examination of their lives.