

ELICITING FRONTSTAGE AND BACKSTAGE TALK WITH THE ITERATED QUESTIONING APPROACH

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Abstract

This article advances interviewing methods by introducing the authors' original contribution: the iterated questioning approach (IQA). This interviewing technique augments the interviewer's methodological arsenal by exploiting insights from symbolic interactionism, particularly Goffman's concepts of frontstage and backstage. IQA consists of sequenced iterations of a baseline question designed to elicit multiple forms of talk. The approach consists of four distinct steps: (1) establishing the baseline iterated question, (2) eliciting frontstage talk, (3) going backstage, and (4) eliciting backstage talk. To illuminate IQA's versatility, transcript excerpts are reproduced from interviews with two very different populations: disadvantaged high school students and business professionals. IQA promises to invigorate future interview-based inquiry by offering significant advantages compared with conventional interviewing procedures. IQA's theoretically informed question design offers a more formalized and structured approach to gather interview data on identity-relevant themes. Capitalizing on Goffman's dramaturgical

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framework, IQA produces readily classifiable forms of talk that correspond to frontstage and backstage self-presentations. As a result, IQA ensures replicability and allows interviewers to systematically analyze comparable talk within the same interview as well as across multiple respondents. For these reasons, IQA promises to be an innovative interviewing technique that pushes forward the methodological frontier.

Keywords

iterated questioning approach, IQA, interviewing, question design, qualitative methods, symbolic interaction, Goffman, backstage, frontstage, dramaturgy

1. INTRODUCING IQA

The time is ripe for new contributions to the craft of interviewing as an important sociological method. Recent debates have pushed this venerable staple of sociological research to the center of an ongoing methodological conversation (Pugh 2013). The emergent consensus holds that interviewing is an indispensable technique to gather data on identity broadly defined. In their programmatic statement, Lamont and Swidler (2014) affirmed the value of in-depth interviewing for analyzing identities and lived experiences. According to a National Science Foundation report on qualitative research, the strength of in-depth interviewing resides in its capacity to capture the contours of identity work, self-conceptions, emotions, and meanings (Ragin, Nagel, and White 2003).

Indeed, as Pugh's (2012, 2015) theoretical and methodological contributions underscore, in-depth interviewing remains an essential instrument of unearthing narratives providing insight into identity-relevant themes and revealing multiple layers of meaning and emotion. Skillful in-depth interviewing makes it possible to elicit multidimensional interview talk and to probe how interviewees grapple with their social and cultural environments. However, neither interview-based studies nor the methodological literature on interviewing practice offers a roadmap to meeting this goal. To meet this need, we propose just such a roadmap consisting of concrete questioning procedures that enable the interviewer to systematically gather multiple forms of interview talk.

We call this interviewing technique the iterated questioning approach (IQA). IQA offers significant advantages compared with conventional interviewing procedures. First, IQA provides theoretically informed

techniques rooted in symbolic interactionism. Capitalizing on Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical framework, IQA takes advantage of the distinction between self-presentations unfolding in the interactional *frontstage* and self-presentations taking place in the *backstage*. IQA's specially formulated questions allow the interviewer to systematically elicit both frontstage talk calibrated for public consumption and backstage talk produced for private audiences (Rubin and Rubin 1995; Tovares 2007). Second, IQA's sequencing of questions produces readily classifiable forms of talk that correspond to frontstage and backstage self-presentations. IQA's four distinct steps allow the interviewer to easily distinguish between identity performances regarding the same themes and to transparently differentiate the talk produced for different audiences. Third, IQA allows interviewers to gather data in a predictable fashion within the same interview as well as across material from multiple respondents. IQA is thereby designed to ensure replicability by systematically evoking interview talk corresponding to multiple identity positions. IQA offers a formalized and structured approach that exploits the strengths of in-depth interviewing as an interpretive practice carried out by the interviewer in collaboration with an active interviewee (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). Finally, these innovations strengthen the "interviewing partnership" (Weiss 1994:99) by enhancing rapport, boosting interactivity, and leveling power differentials between interviewers and respondents.

To present the advances afforded by IQA, this article is organized as follows. In Section 1, conventional interviewing practices are put in dialogue with the symbolic interactionist framework undergirding IQA. Section 2 outlines IQA's four-step iterated question design. Section 3 reproduces transcript materials from two very different respondent groups (disadvantaged high school students and business professionals) to show how IQA techniques have been fruitfully used with an array of respondents. Section 4 discusses the conditions under which IQA may be a vital tool available to the interviewer, as well as the methodological challenges that arose in the field trials and strategies employed to successfully address them. Finally, Section 5 concludes the article by illustrating the advantages of IQA vis-à-vis conventional interviewing, as well as on its own terms.

1.1. *Rapport-based Approaches to Interviewing*

Rapport plays a central role in conventional in-depth interviewing, particularly when researchers wish to trigger self-disclosure and activate

multiple identity positions (Holstein and Gubrium 1995; Mishler 1986). Strong rapport can evoke spontaneous visceral narratives in addition to more scripted honorable narratives (Pugh 2015). Thus, many guides to interviewing underscore the key role of rapport in encouraging respondents to open up about experiences and feelings (Weiss 1994), as well as in eliciting identity-relevant narratives (Alvesson 2011).

Rapport-building strategies include multiple interviews and verbal affirmations that acknowledge respect for the interviewee (Weiss 1994). Rapport also results from practices such as active listening in which the interviewer remains attentive, sustains eye contact, and conveys non-judgmental empathy by mirroring the respondent's emotions (Wengraf 2001). Physical signaling such as leaning forward to convey emotional understanding and respect may also contribute to rapport (Rubin and Rubin 1995). Others call for the interview to resemble what has been called a therapeutic event (Lee 1993) in which the interviewer takes on the role of trusted confidant. In sum, rapport facilitates the movement between different levels of self-disclosure in which the interviewee shifts self-presentation from a public self to an emotional self (Weiss 1994).

Where existing interview studies are concerned, strong rapport has served as the primary catalyst for facilitating shifts in self-presentations and accompanying multidimensional narratives. Pugh's (2012) work on varying cultures of commitment demonstrates the capacity of high-rapport, in-depth interviewing to garner multiple forms of talk regarding the same identity-relevant themes. The strong rapport evident in Pugh's interviews functions to elicit honorable narratives highlighting dominant cultural norms, as well as visceral narratives conveying culturally subversive content. For example, in discussing their work and private lives, respondents' honorable narratives rehearse dominant American cultural scripts celebrating self-sufficiency and emotional invulnerability. By contrast, in their emotionally loaded visceral narratives, the very same interviewees disclose their sense of vulnerability to betrayal by self-interested others (Pugh 2012). Here we see how visceral narratives reveal respondents' private self-presentations sometimes at odds with their public social faces. In this way, Pugh's interviewing demonstrates the capacity of high-rapport in-depth interviewing to garner multiple forms of talk regarding the same identity-relevant themes.

Building strong and sustained rapport will always be an important means of facilitating the movement between different levels of self-disclosure. However, rapport is a fragile and fickle condition that relies

wholly on the skills of the interviewer rather than on question design. In contrast, IQA's replicable techniques make both data collection and analysis more predictable. For these reasons, we propose IQA to exploit the potential for specially formulated and sequenced questions as a means of systematically eliciting multiple forms of interview talk thematizing the same topic.

1.2. *A Goffmanian Approach to Interviewing*

Although valuable, methodological works highlighting rapport fail to provide guidelines by which the interviewer may activate multiple identity positions in a replicable or systematic way. Existing work on interviewing question design overlooks Goffman's insights regarding the presentation of self frontstage and backstage. To fill these gaps, IQA integrates Pugh's insights into honorable and visceral narratives with Goffman's dramaturgical concepts of frontstage and backstage. This synthesis enables interviewers to formulate replicable questions that predictably elicit frontstage and backstage talk. Drawing from Goffman, the terms *frontstage talk* and *backstage talk* are used to show how particular interviewing techniques can produce complementary narratives regarding the same identity-relevant theme. For Goffman (1959), in the frontstage, when "the individual presents himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the official accredited values" (p. 35). Referencing Robert Ezra Park, Goffman (1967) also maintained that the social actor's frontstage represents "the conception we have formed of ourselves—the role we are striving to live up to" (p. 19). When answering questions frontstage, interviewees construct face-building talk (Dominici and Littlejohn 2006) often expressed through Pugh's honorable narratives conforming to cultural expectations. In contrast, backstage interactions allow interviewees to express face-threatening narratives (Dominici and Littlejohn 2006). Safely backstage, interviewees can "drop their front" and "step out of character" (Goffman 1959:112). According to Prasad (2005), "The backstage is also a place where we hide a self that, if revealed, might prove to be awkward, embarrassing, or even suspect" (p. 46–47). Backstage talk is often expressed through visceral narratives that challenge cultural expectations and fall out of alignment with honorable narratives expressed frontstage.

In applying Goffmanian concepts to the craft of interview question design, IQA blazes a new trail. To date, Goffman's concepts have

primarily been used to interpret bodies of data subsequent to their collection (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2009). However, interviewers have not incorporated Goffmanian insights into question design. Myers and Newman (2007) applied a Goffmanian lens to understand the dynamics of the interview encounter. Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2003) called attention to facework as it occurs in interviews with male respondents. Demant and Järvinen (2006) analyzed the interview encounter in terms of their respondents' impression management. Tannen and Wallat (1987) made use of Goffman's concepts of footing and frame in interaction. Although important, none of these studies reveals how the interviewer can use a Goffmanian framework to build interview questions designed to elicit frontstage and backstage talk.

In contrast, IQA's systematic approach realizes the full potential of Goffman's (1959, 1967) extended dramaturgy metaphor and Pugh's (2015) multidimensional narratives with purposefully designed interview questions. Approaching interviewing from a symbolic interactionist perspective, interviewers can gather rich data by drawing out different facets of interviewees' self-presentations. With IQA, the interviewer can design questions that explicitly elicit data revealing interviewees' conceptions of the "I" and the "me" (Mead 1934). In Goffmanian terms, by using IQA, the interviewer can strategically uncover individuals' frontstage and backstage presentations of self.

2. IQA: NUTS AND BOLTS

In this section we outline the nuts and bolts of iterated questioning. IQA simulates exchanges with interlocutors drawn from interviewees' personal communities (Spencer and Pahl 2006). Posing permutations of the same question—formulated in very specific ways—at different points during the interview invites interviewees to perform a credible frontstage self-presentation that articulates honorable narratives while allowing them to produce potentially divergent visceral narratives in the safety of backstage. By answering the iterated questions in sequence, the interviewee progresses through frontstage performances before taking the interviewer backstage. Once backstage, the respondent is liberated from the need to maintain a consistent self-presentation and is shielded from identity threats due to shamefacing (Goffman 1967).

IQA was developed through interviews with a total of 77 individuals drawn from studies carried out with two different groups of respondents:

disadvantaged high school students and business professionals. The initial field trials involved interviews with 21 respondents and were used to refine IQA's four steps. Refined techniques used with an additional 56 respondents confirmed that no further changes were needed to IQA. This section presents the four finalized steps of the IQA sequence as it emerged from this process of field testing and validation.

2.1. Step 1: Establishing the Baseline Iterated Question

After background questions have been asked, the interviewer initiates the IQA sequence. In step 1, the interviewer introduces the baseline form of the iterated question on one of the interview's central themes. To create the baseline question, the interviewer uses a straightforward approach recommended in traditional interviewing practice (Weiss 1994). Once the interviewee has answered the baseline question, the interviewer indicates that the interaction has been successfully concluded. Often a brief "okay" or "yes" will do. The interviewer should then pursue other related questions so that an interval elapses before moving to the next step.

2.2. Step 2: Eliciting Frontstage Talk

In step 2, the interviewer asks a variation of the iterated question to elicit frontstage talk intended for a third-party interlocutor, posing a question as it may have been discussed by the respondent with a third party not present at the interview. Frontstage questions are especially effective when they feature institutional representatives, acquaintances, or any other untrusted others who are not a confidant or intimate of the respondent—audiences for which the respondent would produce honorable narratives. For example, if the interviewer is interested in institutional identities, the third party should represent the institution. Subsequently, the interviewer proceeds with other related questions so that an interval elapses before moving to the next step.

2.3. Step 3: Going Backstage

In step 3, the interview moves backstage, where interviewees may safely share visceral narratives. As with previous steps, the interviewer continues to craft this iteration of the baseline question to maintain thematic

alignment. The interviewer asks two questions in sequence: “Tell me the name of someone you trust—a confidant with whom you could talk freely about [theme of iterated question]” and “Tell me about [interviewee’s trusted third party].” Through these questions, the interviewer invites the interviewee to craft a self-presentation geared toward trusted audiences. Once the interviewee has named at least one trusted third party, the interviewer then asks, “Tell me about [trusted third party].” In asking these questions, the interviewer is explicitly asking permission to be taken backstage, where it will be safe for the respondent to invoke visceral narratives. In step 3, as with the rest of the IQA sequence, the interviewer continues to signal respect for the sincerity of the interviewee’s self-presentations. However, unlike previous steps that require an interval, after the two questions in step 3 have been asked in sequence and answered, the interviewer should immediately proceed to step 4 without an interval.

2.4. Step 4: Eliciting Backstage Talk

Step 4 continues the backstage steps in the sequence. Here, the interviewer asks a two-part variation of the iterated question. The interviewer reformulates the iterated question using the following script: “Imagine you are talking to [trusted third party] alone where no one can hear you. [Trusted third party] will keep what you say private. If [trusted third party] asked you [iterated question], how would you answer?” and “How would [trusted third party] respond?” If the interviewee had mentioned more than one trusted person in step 3, the interviewer should follow up with each named interlocutor in step 4, as all of the trusted interlocutors are potential audiences for visceral narratives. Respondents will answer in one of two ways. They will either verbalize an imagined conversation with their trusted interlocutor, or they will replay an actual conversation that has already occurred with that trusted person. In either case, the interviewee articulates valuable backstage talk. Finally, in step 4, some interviewees may produce talk that bridges their frontstage and backstage self-presentations. If the interviewee does not initiate bridging talk, the interviewer may wish to extend step 4 by gently inviting the respondent to bring frontstage and backstage talk into dialogue with one another. Here, hypothetical formulations may prove particularly useful. When inviting the interviewee to articulate frontstage and backstage talk

alongside one another, the interviewer continues to signal that the interaction has been successfully concluded.

3. IQA EXEMPLARS: REPRESENTATIVE CASES

This section reviews the application of IQA with four exemplars, each illustrating an analytically revealing permutation of IQA. Transcript excerpts show how IQA succeeds in eliciting comparable frontstage and backstage talk from two very different populations: high school students and business professionals. The first two exemplars are Hunter and Marta, economically disadvantaged high school seniors in a blue-collar town, who are asked about their college plans, a highly self-relevant theme. Will and Kim, successful business professionals in a large metropolitan city, serve as the second pair of exemplars. Their interviews are focused on the self-relevant theme of work-family balance. Please note, all names and places are pseudonyms to protect anonymity.

3.1. *High School Student Hunter*

Hunter, the first exemplar, plans on attending a local community college following high school graduation. Whereas Hunter's strategic frontstage self-presentation draws on institutionally validated scripts about financial prudence, his backstage talk presents an institutionally nonconformist self averse to the idea of attending a four-year college on his own. Without his loyal "posse," Hunter fears the loss of his academic lifeline, as well as his social support network. Hunter's transcript demonstrates how IQA creates a safe interactional space conducive to the disclosure of nonconformist self-presentations.

3.1.1. *Step 1: Establishing the Baseline Iterated Question.* In step 1 of IQA, Hunter is invited to articulate honorable narratives in the form of institutionally sanctioned scripts about college planning. Hunter answers the baseline question by appealing to financial rationales as the driving force behind his plan to attend community college.

- Interviewer: What are your plans after graduation?
Hunter: I'm going to Jefferson [local community college].
Interviewer: Why is this a good choice for you?
Hunter: Money. Jefferson's cheap.
Interviewer: Did you apply to any four-year schools?

- Hunter: Yeah. Cal State Long Beach.
 Interviewer: Were you accepted?
 Hunter: Uh huh.
 Interviewer: So, you're going to Jefferson instead of CSU Long Beach?
 Hunter: Yup. Goin' to Jefferson. . . . Like I said, it's cheap.

3.1.2. *Step 2: Eliciting Frontstage Talk.* In step 2, the interviewer asks Hunter a variation of the iterated question designed to elicit frontstage talk. Hunter is asked to envision discussing his college plans with a teacher acting in the capacity of an institutional representative. In response, Hunter imagines a hypothetical conversation with a teacher, as well as the teacher's validation of this frontstage talk.

- Interviewer: Imagine that you are talking to a teacher. If the teacher asked you "Why are you going to Jefferson?" how would you answer?
 Hunter: Like I'd bring up the money. You know those four-years are really expensive.
 Interviewer: Anything else?
 Hunter: Hmm, probably about Coach Rivera coming into our class and it makin' me think about how goin' to Jefferson is gonna save me a lot of money.
 Interviewer: And what do you think the teacher would say to you?
 Hunter: Dunno. "Good for you" or something.

3.1.3. *Step 3: Going Backstage.* In step 3, the interviewer directs Hunter's attention to someone who would be considered a confidant, a trusted interlocutor rather than an institutional representative. Introducing Baxter, Hunter takes the interviewer backstage.

- Interviewer: Tell me the name of someone you trust— a confidant with whom you could talk freely about your future plans.
 Hunter: That'd be Baxter.
 Interviewer: Tell me about Baxter.
 Hunter: He's like my bud. I've known him forever.

3.1.4. *Step 4: Eliciting Backstage Talk and Bridging Talk.* In step 4, the interviewer reiterates the baseline question as if asked by Baxter, Hunter's trusted friend. In response, Hunter imagines a hypothetical conversation in which he is free to express visceral narratives that run

counter to institutional scripts. Hunter's backstage talk reveals a non-conformist self with very different priorities than the frontstage self he presented to teachers as institutional representatives. Backstage, Hunter is primarily concerned with avoiding the risks posed by separation from his "posse": missing out on good times, loss of his academic safety net, and potential stigmatization as a college dropout should he go "off solo" and fail. The interviewer closes the IQA sequence with a gentle query inviting Hunter to self-reflectively compare his frontstage and backstage narratives. To do so, the interviewer poses a hypothetical question that allows Hunter to maintain face while voicing both kinds of talk.

- Interviewer: Imagine you are talking to Baxter alone where no one can hear you. Baxter will keep what you say private. If Baxter asked you "Why are you going to Jefferson?" how would you answer?
- Hunter: If I'm talking to Baxter, yeah, I'd probably say, "Like why go to Long Beach when we can take it easy here?" [laughs]
- Interviewer: How would Baxter respond?
- Hunter: Yeah, man. Yeah, he'd get it. Baxter'd say that like it sucks to go off somewhere alone when everybody's stayin' here and havin' a good time together.
- Interviewer: Tell me more about how Baxter would "get it."
- Hunter: Yeah, like he got into [CSU] Fresno but he's not going. So, yeah, we're gonna be chillin' at Jefferson. No stressin', dude [laughs].
- Interviewer: [Laughs] What about your teachers? Would they "get it"?
- Hunter: They'd get it for sure about the money but maybe not the other part.
- Interviewer: The "other part"?
- Hunter: You know, the chillin' part.
- Interviewer: So imagine that you and Baxter both got full-ride scholarships to the same college and could "chill" together at say Cal State Long Beach or Fresno. What would happen then?
- Hunter: Dude, like we'd be on our way!
- Interviewer: Yeah?
- Hunter: Yeah, not like Rick. You know, the dude who like crashed and burned 'cause he went off solo. Like dude, I'm not gonna do a Rickster an' bomb out of a four-year just 'cause I don't have my posse. I'll be with my posse at Jefferson.

3.2. High School Student Marta

The second exemplar, Marta, differs in important ways from Hunter as a respondent. An academically ambitious young woman aspiring to be the first person in her family to attend college, Marta has earned a scholarship that will pay for her education at a four-year college. In contrast to Hunter, who is held fast by ties to his personal community, Marta's friends are dispersing upon graduation. Further unlike Hunter, Marta feels ready to tackle the academics at a four-year college. However, she doubts her capacity to thrive in an intimidating social environment with "rich kids." Here, the power of IQA unlocks a vulnerable self that is comfortable expressing self-doubt and inner conflict in the safety of the backstage.

3.2.1. *Step 1: Establishing the Baseline Iterated Question.* In step 1, Marta answers the baseline question with honorable narratives about her intended program of study, as well as fiscal responsibility.

- Interviewer: What are your plans after graduation?
 Marta: Going to a four-year! [CSU] Northridge here I come!
 Interviewer: Why is this a good choice for you?
 Marta: They have my major, and the price is right. I think it's good.
 Interviewer: Did you apply to other any four-year schools?
 Marta: Mostly Cal States.
 Interviewer: Which ones?
 Marta: Uhh . . . Northridge, Chico, and San Diego.
 Interviewer: Were you accepted?
 Marta: Well, I got in almost everywhere I applied.
 Interviewer: And you're going to Northridge?
 Marta: That's right.
 Interviewer: How did you make your decision?
 Marta: They've got my program, and I got good financial aid.

3.2.2. *Step 2: Eliciting Frontstage Talk.* In step 2, the interviewer invites Marta to articulate frontstage talk in which she imagines conversations with multiple teachers. Frontstage, Marta dutifully recites institutionally validated scripts.

- Interviewer: Imagine that you are talking to a teacher. If the teacher asked you "Why are you going to Northridge?" how would you answer?
 Marta: I guess I would tell them that I got good financial aid.

- Interviewer: Anything else?
Marta: That I like Northridge 'cause they have my major.
Interviewer: And what do you think the teacher would say to you?
Marta: Mostly they would want to make sure about financial aid and all of that.

3.2.3. Step 3: Going Backstage. In step 3, Marta selects her mentor, Mrs. Lafitte, as her trusted interlocutor.

- Interviewer: Tell me the name of someone you trust—a confidant with whom you could talk freely about your future plans.
Marta: OK, [pause] Mrs. Lafitte.
Interviewer: Tell me about Mrs. Lafitte.
Marta: She comes into where I work. She's *really* cool.
Interviewer: Oh yeah? Tell me more about why she's cool.
Marta: She always wants to know how I'm doing and makes time to talk to me.

3.2.4. Step 4: Eliciting Backstage Talk. In step 4, Marta reveals her vulnerabilities when she recounts an actual conversation she had with her mentor, Mrs. Lafitte. Marta airs her innermost fears about her college plans in visceral narratives. Her backstage talk unveils the emotional burdens weighing on a young woman from a poverty-level school—burdens she must surmount if she is to earn a college degree and put herself on a path to upward mobility. Mrs. Lafitte functions as an indispensable interlocutor as she invites Marta into her own backstage by sharing her own struggles as a first-generation college student. Encouraged by Mrs. Lafitte's own backstage revelation, Marta conquers her fears and feels emboldened to “go ahead” and do her best. Step 4 closes with Marta juxtaposing her frontstage and backstage answers with a hybrid response joining both honorable and visceral narratives.

- Interviewer: Imagine that you are talking to Mrs. Lafitte alone where no one can hear you. Mrs. Lafitte will keep what you say private. If Mrs. Lafitte asked you “Why are you going to Northridge?” how would you answer?
Marta: Well, she did talk to me about it when she came into my work. I was kinda dealing with this whole college thing, having a hard time with it.
Interviewer: How did Mrs. Lafitte respond?

- Marta: She really listened to me. You know I was totally nervous. And talking to her made me know that it's OK to be scared. And that's what was holding me back.
- Interviewer: Tell me more.
- Marta: I mean I thought maybe I won't fit in. Or maybe everyone will be different. Like they'll have lots of money and stuff. And won't want to be friends with people like me.
- Interviewer: Did you talk about this to Mrs. Lafitte?
- Marta: Yeah, totally. She told me to go look at the college website and get a feel for the students. She told me that it wouldn't be just a bunch of rich kids and how she was the first person in her family to go to college and how it was hard, but I just had to go ahead. And I had to do my best.
- Interviewer: So what happened next?
- Marta: I looked at the website. And I found these stories about students. And there are like a bunch of students like me at Northridge. And I was like surprised 'cause like not all of their families had went [*sic*] to college and some of them had hard stuff going on. But they made it, and they were like graduating. So I think it'll be good for me to go there too.
- Interviewer: It sounds like you have really thought things out. So please recap it for me. What makes going to Northridge good for you? The kinds of students or financial aid or your major?
- Marta: Well, all of them. I mean you gotta have the money or like you can't go. But if you got a choice, you need to feel good about where you're going or like you might not stay—even if they've got your major.

3.3. *Business Professional Will*

The third exemplar is Will, a corporate attorney who often works 11-hour days during the week and a few hours on the weekends. Will has a wife and children who compete for time and attention with his all-consuming professional obligations. Will's interview offers an illuminating foil to the other exemplars. Only Will overtly identifies with his frontstage audience composed of likeminded peers. Thus, Will's frontstage talk is an authentic expression of his own views, even as it replicates the scripts sanctioned by his workplace. However, Will chooses a critical friend as his backstage interlocutor, leading to an imagined conversation in which he confesses his unease. Will's interview shows what

IQA can accomplish when respondents present their idealized selves in their frontstage talk, while presenting a more vulnerable self backstage.

3.3.1. *Step 1: Establishing the Baseline Iterated Question.* In answering the baseline question, Will enlists the honorable narrative regarding breadwinning that conforms to cultural expectations. He attempts to reconcile two idealized yet competing roles: devoted father and dedicated professional.

Interviewer: Currently, at your present job, how are you handling the demands of work and family?

Will: It's tough. I want to be there and spend time with my daughter. So, we really make it a priority for us to eat dinner as a family on the weekends. As long as I'm not under the gun, I work from home on the weekends and spend some time with Hailie. Then I can still put in a few hours on my laptop to be ready to go for Monday.

3.3.2. *Step 2: Eliciting Frontstage Talk.* In step 2, in his frontstage talk with colleagues as institutional representatives, Will rationalizes prioritizing investment in his career rather than in his parenting by defending his choice in terms that his audience is likely to understand.

Interviewer: Imagine talking to a colleague. If your colleague asked you "How are you handling the demands of work and family right now?" how would you answer?

Will: It's a demanding line of work, but it's a choice that every single one of us made willingly. Seriously, we're playing in the big leagues, and that's what it takes to be the best. You've got to work out a long-term trajectory. It may mean spending less time with your kids when they're little. But that's a small price to pay for making partner. And then you can be more of a regular father. For now, I'm lucky to have my wife. She's gotten used to controlling the home environment. Once I make partner, I'll have a more manageable schedule and spend more time with my kids when they're older . . . and I'll have a bigger paycheck to do it right.

3.3.3. *Step 3: Going Backstage.* In step 3, Will identifies Lenny as his trusted interlocutor and goes backstage. Unlike other exemplars, Will's backstage self-disclosures are catalyzed by an imagined conversation with a critical friend who challenges his decisions.

- Interviewer: Tell me the name of someone you trust—a confidant with whom you could talk freely about managing the demands of work and family.
- Will: I have a friend, Lenny. We go way back.
- Interviewer: Tell me about Lenny.
- Will: Lenny and I were at school together—been friends ever since. He’s also Hailie’s godfather and never misses an opportunity to let me know everything I’m doing wrong [chuckle].

3.3.4. Step 4: Eliciting Backstage Talk. In step 4, Will’s backstage interlocutor, Lenny, takes Will to task for not living up to his parenting ideals. In this imagined conversation, Will’s visceral narrative reveals his “guilt” over allowing work commitments to monopolize his attentions and divert time and energy from his daughter. The sequence concludes when Will bridges his frontstage and backstage talk by worrying that one day it “will just be too late” to realize his parental aspirations. Here, he owns up to the pain resulting from the parental bonding opportunities he has sacrificed on the altar of his career.

- Interviewer: Imagine you are talking to Lenny alone where no one can hear you. Lenny will keep what you say private. If Lenny asked you “How are you handling the demands of work and family right now?” how would you answer?
- Will: I’d say that I probably could be at home a little more than I am right now.
- Interviewer: And how would Lenny respond?
- Will: Hah! Lenny is not exactly my role model. You see, he made a career switch himself and says it was the best thing that he ever did for his family. So I’m sure he would say that I should do the same thing.
- Interviewer: And what would you say to Lenny?
- Will: I’d ask him if he’s offering to pay my mortgage [chuckle]. No, seriously, on a certain level, he may be right [pause].
- Interviewer: How so?
- Will: On a good day, I’ll make it home in time for dinner, and things seem to be working. But other days I’ll come home late, and Hailie will already be in bed or she’ll say something that guilts me out. Those days, I wonder if I can really make up for the time later, or if it will just be too late [sigh].

3.4. *Business Professional Kim*

Kim, the fourth exemplar, is a high-flying female executive at a Silicon Valley company who travels extensively for work. Married with children, Kim's family competes for time and attention with her all-consuming professional obligations. At the beginning of the sequence, Kim uses humor to evince skepticism toward the idea of reconciling work and family obligations. During the frontstage phase, she delivers a strategic self-presentation crafted for her frontstage audience of male colleagues. Alone among the exemplars, Kim's case illustrates the potential of conversations with real or hypothetical strangers. With a sympathetic stranger, Kim sheds her tough exterior and speaks freely about the toll her work has exacted on her family life. In Kim's case, the IQA sequence evokes frontstage and backstage talk from a self-reflective respondent who needs a safe and anonymous interactional space in which to unveil a vulnerable self.

3.4.1. Step 1: Establishing the Baseline Iterated Question. In step 1, Kim offers a humorous response to the baseline question, intimating her discomfort with practices prevailing in her male-dominated professional world. Whereas her male counterpart, Will, began the sequence by touting his ability to reconcile the demands of professional work and parenting, Kim's tongue-in-cheek tone serves to mark her skepticism about the ideal of balancing work and parenting obligations.

Interviewer: Currently, at your present job, how are you handling the demands of work and family?

Kim: Family, what family? Oh yeah, I have sons! I'm hoping to get some quality time with my boys before they go off to college [laughs]. No, really, things are as good as it gets.

3.4.2. Step 2: Eliciting Frontstage Talk. In step 2, Kim's frontstage talk is calibrated for her workplace audience. Her talk conforms to her male colleagues' expectations, namely that she can and will operate as they do, adopting a single-minded focus on work without allowing family matters to interfere. Unlike Will, who expresses his affinity for his workplace ideology, Kim signals her distance from institutional scripts by sarcastically parroting the "party line."

- Interviewer: Imagine that you are talking to a colleague. If your colleague asked you “How are you handling the demands of work and family right now?” how would you answer?
- Kim: I’d say everything is fine, thank you very much. Husband is fine, check. Kids are fine, check. Family is fine, check. It’s all good.
- Interviewer: How would this colleague respond?
- Kim: Respond? I wouldn’t expect a response. Where I work, “How are you?” is strictly a rhetorical question. . . . Look, I mostly work with high-octane guys. There’s no place for uber mom. So it’s pretty much don’t ask, don’t tell. Sick kids? Got a nanny for that, right? The guys just don’t want to hear about it . . . at work, it’s all work. The party line is that everything is running smoothly at home in nannyland, and so let’s get on the deadline, gentlemen.

3.4.3. *Step 3: Going Backstage.* Kim’s backstage scenario marks a contrast with the backstage scenarios of the other three exemplars. Rather than someone from her personal community, Kim prefers to go backstage with a nonjudgmental stranger who offers a sympathetic ear as well as the assurance of privacy and confidentiality.

- Interviewer: Tell me the name of someone you trust—a confidant with whom you could talk freely about managing the demands of work and family.
- Kim: Oddly enough it’s easier to talk to strangers. One thing I love about traveling is that you meet people and can say anything you want because you’ll never see them again. You know, ships passing in the night.
- Interviewer: Please elaborate.
- Kim: Strangers—people you will never see again, so you can tell them how it really is—the unvarnished truth. Like you, in fact—I’ll probably never see you again after this interview.

3.4.4. *Step 4: Eliciting Backstage Talk.* In her backstage talk, Kim confronts the hard realities standing in the way of reconciling her work and family lives. Articulating a heartfelt and visceral narrative, Kim admits to struggling with the impossible challenge of meshing devoted motherhood with a successful professional career in the family-unfriendly tech world.

- Interviewer: OK! Imagine you are talking to one of these strangers—one of these ships passing in the night as you say—alone where no one can hear you. This stranger will keep what you say private. If the stranger asked you “How are you handling the demands of work and family right now?” how would you answer?
- Kim: So like I was saying . . . strangers. . . . One time, I was in Vegas for this show . . . what goes on in Vegas stays in Vegas . . . [laughs] and I met Linda in the sauna. So, we’re just sitting there in the sauna in our towels, just the two of us, and we get to talking and I pretty much unload. . . . When I’m on deadline it is such a rush, but then I come down, and this little voice asks if I’m failing them as a mom [sighs].
- Interviewer: How did Linda respond?
- Kim: She knew what I meant. We both grew up thinking we could do it all . . . bring home the bacon, fry it up in a pan [pause], but you have to choose. I mean I can’t very well say, “Hey, I’ll take half the prestige for half of the hours.” In my world, it’s all or nothing. So, do I want to keep the career I worked so hard for? Or do I give it up for momdom? Is that even a choice?

3.5. The Four Exemplars: Comparable Talk and Multidimensional Narratives

Each exemplar renders apparent the strengths of IQA as a means of eliciting rich yet readily classifiable interview talk. IQA’s theoretically informed sequential questions make it possible for the interviewer to interrogate the same theme manifested in narratives corresponding to different self-presentations. Starting with the baseline question in step 1, progressing to the frontstage question in step 2, and concluding with the backstage questions in steps 3 and 4, the IQA sequence facilitates the comparison of responses both within a single interview as well as across multiple interviewees. Because IQA works in the same way for diverse respondents, it affords opportunities for systematic and meaningful comparisons of parallel interview talk across different individuals. As cross-respondent comparisons are a staple of interview-based research, this strength offers important payoffs in the analysis of interview material.

These four exemplars, all typical of multiple cases within the data set, demonstrate the versatility of IQA as a technique applicable across multiple themes and respondents. Despite the idiosyncrasies of the respondents' life circumstances, the sequence moves predictably from frontstage talk to backstage talk in all four representative cases. Moreover, IQA works well with prospective themes such as imagined educational futures (Frye 2012), seen with Hunter and Marta, as well as retrospective themes such as work-family choices, evident in interviews with Will and Kim. In the backstage part of the sequence, interviewees enter a safe interactional space where they can give expression to their nonconformist selves, vulnerable selves, and flawed selves, all of which are hidden in the frontstage. The sequence as a whole enables respondents to give voice to sometimes discordant narratives without feeling the discomfort that often accompanies the expression of inconsistent views in traditional interviewing.

The payoffs of IQA become readily apparent through examination of Hunter and Marta as representative cases. For this pair of interviewees, IQA makes it an easy matter to contrast respondents in terms of their frontstage self-presentations containing honorable narratives and their backstage self-presentations drawing on visceral narratives. Without IQA, the analyst would perforce compare interview talk from Hunter and Marta without necessarily knowing how to classify their talk in terms of identity positions, self-presentations, or types of narrative.

In a non-IQA interview, it would appear that Hunter and Marta mirror one another in their focus on financial prudence as the deciding factor in college plans. However, once the IQA sequence moves into the backstage phase, it becomes clear that Hunter and Marta harbor radically different orientations toward their postsecondary trajectories. Both have become fluent in the honorable narratives demanded by the school, even though they have drifted far apart in terms of how they view the college planning process in their more private moments. In Hunter's case, the presence of a likeminded and affirming backstage interlocutor brings to the surface an aversion to risks absent from his frontstage talk. Backstage, Hunter confesses an unwillingness to strike out on his own to attend a four-year school if it means separation from the academic and social support provided by his personal community. By contrast, Marta's backstage talk—triggered by an encounter with an interventionist mentor—conveys a genuine desire to follow the institutionally sanctioned postsecondary trajectory that vies with her fear of social

ostracism at the hands of economically advantaged peers. In these ways, IQA reveals how Marta stands apart from Hunter.

The cross-respondent comparison between Will and Kim, two business professionals, is also aided by the parallel structures of IQA sequences. Once backstage, Will and Kim, like Hunter and Marta, switch self-presentations predictably in response to imagined or remembered conversational scenarios built into IQA's question formulation. Unlike Marta and Hunter, Will and Kim diverge in terms of their affinity for the frontstage talk prompted at the beginning of the IQA sequence. Will illustrates the success of IQA with an interviewee who (1) buys into the honorable narrative encapsulated in his frontstage talk and (2) identifies closely with the frontstage interlocutor. Will typifies respondents in other IQA interviews with male business professionals. By contrast, Kim's frontstage talk is representative of other respondents who feel compelled to at least pay lip service to institutional scripts. Kim's flippant humor is aimed at male colleagues with whom she does not identify. Kim illustrates the analytically important type of respondent who puts forth a strategic frontstage narrative.

Contrary to Marta and Hunter, Kim and Will converge in their backstage talk. Despite choosing significantly different backstage interlocutors, friend versus total stranger, their talk converges at the final stage of the sequence. Here, both Will and Kim unveil the problematic aspects of their work-family decisions and express visceral narratives full of self-doubt and guilt. The IQA sequences reveal that the backstage experience of sacrifice on behalf of one's career carries very similar emotional resonance for these two different interviewees. This commonality between the two business professionals with different life circumstances might well have eluded conventional interviewing techniques. But this convergence is easily captured with IQA, which renders visible the full spectrum of identity positions and narratives for each respondent, allowing targeted comparisons of parallel frontstage and backstage talk across respondents.

4. LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

The presentation of IQA's strengths in the previous section draws on interviews using the finalized version of the technique. In contrast, this section reveals lessons from the field trials indicating the conditions under which IQA strengthens the interviewer's arsenal. First, two

assumptions inform IQA: (1) the interview's themes concern self-identity, and (2) standards of good interviewing practice are observed. Second, the field trials indicate the importance of setting strict parameters for the formulation of backstage questions. In honing IQA techniques in the course of these field trials, it became clear that when these conditions are satisfied, IQA improves the craft of interviewing. Third, in addition to these conditions, some IQA interviews require two related backstage troubleshooting strategies: acknowledging potentially disruptive emotions and creating a safe space by restating the questions using the respondent's own words.

4.1. *Assumptions Informing IQA: Themes and Practices*

The field trials made clear that although identity-relevant themes constitute fertile terrain for the application of IQA, the technique will fall on fallow soil where such themes are absent. In the absence of self-relevant themes, self-presentations and identity performances do not differ across the frontstage-backstage divide, and respondents are likely to articulate identical frontstage and backstage talk. For example, IQA should not be used in interviews emphasizing factual details of particular events or phenomena that have no bearing on respondents' self-presentation (Rubin and Rubin 1995; Weiss 1994).

In tandem, for IQA to succeed, the interviewer must observe standard interviewing practices. Rapport is just as critical a prerequisite for the effectiveness of IQA as it is for less structured forms of in-depth interviewing. The field trials confirmed that it is critical for the IQA interviewer to continually maintain rapport by signaling successful interaction. In the initial field trials, when the interviewer failed to indicate that the interaction had been successfully concluded, interviewees waited for the interviewer and said things like "Okay?" or "Are we good?" In contrast, when the interviewer affirmed the respondent's answer to the questions with a simple "yes" or "okay," this signaled successful interaction and greased the wheels of the interviewing partnership (Weiss 1994). Such rapport building is particularly important for interviews dealing with potentially delicate topics that IQA is designed to handle because respondents often reveal vulnerabilities and discuss aspects of their lives which can elicit feelings of shame or guilt. To use Goffmanian terminology, the interviewer's affirmation allows the interviewee to "maintain face" (Goffman 1967:6). All of these

standard interviewing practices aimed at building rapport support the interviewing partnership.

4.2. *Going Backstage: Question Formulation*

As the initial field trials indicate, IQA works best with the strictly formulated backstage questions in steps 3 and 4. In the initial field trials, more loosely posed questions had to be reformulated with much greater specificity to facilitate the transition to the backstage. More specifically, when the theme of the interview was not clearly specified as part of the question, the interviewees talked through their answers to weigh prospective confidants' trustworthiness. For example, the following exchange appeared in an early field trial with a business professional in what would become step 3.

- Interviewer: Tell me the name of someone you trust.
- Cynthia: Well, someone I trust. Hmm . . . that might be my husband if it had to do with the kids. On the other hand, if it had to do with work, then it would be my colleague Rose. But you know, if it is about my parents, then it would be my sister. So what kind of trust?
- Interviewer: Since we're talking about managing work and family, someone you trust about that.
- Cynthia: That's a hard one. I'd talk to Rose, but someone at work might hear us. I'd talk to my sister, but she might blab.

In response to these issues arising from the field trials, the questions in step 3 were reformulated in the following way: "Tell me the name of someone you trust—a confidant with whom you could talk freely about [theme of iterated question]" and "Tell me about [interviewee's trusted third party]."

In parallel, a few respondents voiced concerns about speaking to a trusted third party and asked the interviewer for more clarity. Interviewees' questions included "Can anyone hear us talking?" and "Will they [trusted confidant] share what I say?" As a result, we refined step 4 questions to add the needed specificity. These reformulations proved successful in subsequent field trials. The final version of the questions reads, "Imagine you are talking to [trusted third party] alone where no one can hear you. [Trusted third party] will keep what you

say private. If [trusted third party] asked you [iterated question] how would you answer?” and “How would [trusted third party] respond?”

4.3. *Troubleshooting Strategies*

The field trials indicated that backstage troubleshooting strategies were necessary when visceral narratives evoked deeply felt emotions. Two related strategies were successful: (1) acknowledging strong emotions and (2) restating the question using the respondent’s own terminology. These strategies were effective in the case of Tomás, a business professional, who teared up when imagining a conversation with his wife about his inability to harmonize work and family demands.

- Interviewer: Imagine you are talking to your wife Jodi alone where no one can hear you. She will keep what you say private. If Jodi asked you “How are you handling the demands of work and family right now?” how would you answer?
- Tomás: [Pause.] It’s not so good right now. She knows that. We’ve talked about it. She knows . . . [long pause, tears up].
- Interviewer: Take all the time that you need.
- Tomás: [Strangled voice.] I may need a break here.
- Interviewer: I understand. We can stop if you like [pause]. You know, talking about work and family—especially people we care about—can evoke strong emotions. These things matter. That’s why we are doing these interviews because we think these things are really important [long pause].
- Tomás: OK, I’m good. Let’s go.
- Interviewer: So you were saying that you’ve shared with Jodi that things aren’t so good right now. What did you say? And how did Jodi respond?

Acknowledging emotions and restating the question using the respondent’s own terminology also worked well with respondents like high school student Samantha:

- Interviewer: Tell me the name of someone you trust.
- Samantha: Dunno. I don’t like to talk about my business. It’s like private.
- Interviewer: I understand. OK. So in general what qualities would make someone trustworthy?
- Samantha: It’s not easy. They can’t be tryin’ to trip you out.

- Interviewer: OK. What else?
- Samantha: They've gotta keep it tight. No loose lips.
- Interviewer: I get it. So imagine that you know someone who cares about you and is not there to trip you out. And this person is going to keep it tight, as you say. OK?
- Samantha: Yeah.
- Interviewer: OK, keep someone like this in mind.
- Samantha: Yeah. OK.
- Interviewer: Now, imagine you are talking to this person alone where no one can hear you. This person will keep what you say private—they're going to keep it tight. If this person asked you "Why are you going to Jefferson?" how would you answer provided there were no loose lips?
- Samantha: Yeah. I see. Well, if they would keep it tight, I would say

In both cases, acknowledging strong emotion and restating the question are effective troubleshooting strategies that create a safe space backstage.

5. CONCLUSIONS: THE DIVIDENDS OF IQA

In-depth interviewing continues to prove its merits as an indispensable research method. Nonetheless, innovative techniques are needed to enrich this venerable method of social science inquiry (Lamont and Swidler 2014). IQA constitutes one such innovative technique that offers significant advantages compared with conventional interviewing procedures. By augmenting rapport and interactivity, while at the same time minimizing power differentials, IQA strengthens the interviewing partnership (Weiss 1994). These advances are accomplished through IQA's Goffmanian approach that delivers theoretically informed questioning techniques, readily classifiable forms of talk, and greater replicability.

5.1. *Strengthening the Interviewing Partnership with IQA*

In conventional interviewing, interviewers who seek to delve into respondents' identity-relevant experiences and feelings often face a challenge in generating both shallow and deep narratives (Rubin and Rubin 1995). Meeting this challenge typically necessitates the cultivation of strong and sustained rapport with interviewees in order to encourage full self-disclosure. Building rapport has clearly paid

dividends, especially when the interviews raise painful topics to the surface (Blair-Loy 2003; Pugh 2015; Silva 2013). Strong and sustained rapport can eventuate in the evocation of spontaneous visceral narratives in addition to more scripted honorable narratives, exemplified in Pugh's (2012, 2015) work on cultures of commitment. But rapport often lies beyond the control of the interviewer and can fluctuate dramatically and unpredictably within the course of an interview. Because rapport is an elusive condition kept alive by the artfulness of the interviewer (Wengraf 2001), it can easily break down. Furthermore, even the most ambitious interviewer will acknowledge that rapport building can consume temporal and emotional resources that the interviewee may not be able to afford (Alvesson 2011). For these reasons interviewers can benefit from IQA to peel back interviewees' surface self-presentations and unearth self-disclosure and visceral narratives.

IQA also advances conventional approaches by augmenting the scope of interactivity within the interview (Alvesson 2011). IQA simulates interactions between interviewees and varied members of their personal communities—ranging from institutional representatives to confidants—in an imagined or remembered way. These simulated conversations make it possible for the interviewee to express frontstage and backstage forms of talk about the same themes. When interviewees are invited to imagine themselves in conversation with various interlocutors with whom they have widely divergent relationships, the range of interactivity is enlarged. In amplifying interactivity in this way, IQA improves conventional interviewing by deepening the interviewing partnership and expanding the inclusiveness of the interview as a dialogical and relational event (Holstein and Gubrium 1995). Moreover, by inviting respondents to enter into simulated conversations, IQA creates additional opportunities to elicit talk that more closely approximates natural conversation (Luker 2009).

At the same time, IQA lessens power differentials between the interviewer and the interviewee and increases trust between them. During the backstage portion of the sequence in particular, the interviewee engages trusted others in conversation rather than a stranger cloaked in the power and authority of the interviewer. This has the effect of mitigating some of the potential estrangement resulting from the frequent asymmetry between a more powerful interviewer and a less powerful interviewee (Mishler 1986). IQA also catalyzes trust, which is indispensable to facilitating self-disclosure regarding “personally threatening and potentially

painful” issues (Lee 1993:98). In these ways, IQA deepens the interviewing partnership by transforming the interview into a relational event (Holstein and Gubrium 1995) involving members of the interviewee’s personal community.

5.2. The Advantages of IQA’s Goffmanian Approach

Incorporating Goffmanian theoretical insights into the formulation of questions and drawing on the Goffmanian distinctions between frontstage and backstage self-presentations (Hester and Francis 1994; Weiss 1994), IQA advances interviewing practice. Rooted in the dramaturgical insights of symbolic interactionism, IQA’s replicable sequenced questions give interviewers a new way of predictably and reliably delivering multidimensional narratives corresponding to both frontstage and backstage self-presentations. IQA does so by triggering the foregrounding of both a self-reflexive me-for-others (Goffman 1959) in the frontstage, as well as a more spontaneous “I” inhabiting the safety of the backstage.

By enabling the interviewer to awaken identity performances in a parallel manner, IQA’s question design also produces readily classifiable forms of talk that correspond to particular self-presentations. Sequencing the iterated questions evokes parallel responses corresponding to frontstage and backstage forms of talk along with the honorable and visceral narratives they contain. In the analysis phase, IQA’s careful sequencing of questions makes the movement between identity positions and accompanying narratives predictable and thereby alleviates the interviewer’s interpretive burden involved in teasing apart public and private identity positions.

Moreover, IQA supplies the interviewer with new tools to tackle the issues of replicability that have been raised with regard to interviewing in particular, as well as qualitative research in general (Luker 2009; Mishler 1986). Because IQA can be applied systematically across a group of respondents, it facilitates comparisons of like with like. For example, equipped with IQA, the analyst is in a position to juxtapose comparable answers to institutional representative questions, as well as comparable answers to trusted interlocutor questions. Thus, interview talk obtained with IQA may be analyzed in a comparative way within the same interview, in multiple interviews with the same respondent, or across material from multiple respondents.

5.3. *Summary of Contributions and Future Interviewing with IQA*

Finally, to summarize, IQA offers significant advantages compared with conventional in-depth interviewing. IQA strengthens the interviewing partnership on three fronts: (1) enhancing rapport, (2) augmenting interactivity, and (3) leveling power differentials. IQA does so thanks to its Goffmanian approach, which provides theoretically informed, replicable questioning techniques designed to gather interview data on identity-relevant themes. These techniques produce readily classifiable forms of talk that correspond to frontstage and backstage self-presentations. As a result, IQA resolves issues of replicability by providing a tool to systematically gather and analyze comparable talk. For all of these reasons, IQA moves the field forward.

We close this article with thoughts on the potential of IQA to spur methodological innovation beyond the qualitative realm. For example, IQA could enhance the vignettes approach in survey research. In surveys employing vignette techniques, respondents are presented with stories and invited to consider how they would respond to hypothetical situations centered on the actions of imaginary characters or “*dramatis personae*” (Finch 1987). Although vignettes vary in their complexity and specificity from one-sentence descriptions of situations to extremely elaborate and highly specified scenarios, the vignettes approach is designed to uncover norms, ideals, and understandings that elude conventionally formulated attitudinal questions (Ganong and Coleman 2006). Both IQA and the vignettes approach encourage the respondent to step outside of the immediate interactional context imposed by the interview or survey and to envision what they would do or say outside of this context. However, IQA affords respondents the opportunity to formulate their answers in the company of concrete interlocutors populating their own lives. In contrast, survey vignettes invite respondents to imagine themselves making decisions and judgments about hypothetical individuals and scenarios. Should survey researchers choose to incorporate IQA techniques into survey-based questions, they could appropriate some of the more dynamic elements of IQA by crafting a set of vignettes corresponding to both frontstage and backstage situations.

Looking forward, we consider the applicability of IQA to enrich future sociological inquiry. Our exemplars have demonstrated that IQA may be fruitfully used with diverse respondent groups as well as with identity-relevant themes relating to traditional sociological topics such

as work and family or educational and career aspirations. Therefore, IQA holds much potential for a variety of additional sociological sub-fields. IQA promises to open new doors for the sociology of culture, where interviewing has anchored pioneering work on cultural assumptions and boundary-drawing (Lamont 1992), emotion work (Hochschild 1983), and devotional schemas (Blair-Loy 2003). Life-course research could also benefit from IQA, as it yields both frontstage and backstage accounts of biographical experiences. Digital sociology researchers tackling identity-relevant dimensions of social media or mediated communication will also find IQA a valuable addition to their methodological toolkits. Using IQA techniques can enhance interviews dealing with sensitive topics such as gender, ethnic identity, health, sexuality, or criminality, as well as highly polarizing subjects with identity-relevant dimensions such as gun control, immigration, and abortion. Given the flexibility and versatility of IQA as a means of exploring a range of topics and themes, IQA promises to be an innovative interviewing technique that advances the methodological frontier.

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