

31 October 2019

*Narrators will share/recite/tell 5-7 minutes short stories, anecdotes, case studies, research snapshots, poetry, or lyrics that capture something salient, for them, about the relationship between adolescents and their contexts. How does this relationship affect adolescents' health, well-being, identity or sense of agency?*

I thought I would use my 7 minutes by sharing with you a participatory methodological tool that we have been developing over time as a rich addition to existing research and intervention methods given its potential to enhance the transformational possibilities of work with young people in Africa.

Social network interviewing (SNI) is an exploratory research and intervention tool from South Africa aimed at creating a template for young people to engage with community members in areas of concern for both. In SNI, research participants carry out interviews with members of their social networks, including parents, extended family, teachers, friends, local authority figures and religious leaders, based on questions developed collaboratively but aligned to a conceptual template. The aim of SNI is to offer both a research and intervention tool where productive conversations between young people and community members are facilitated. By cycling through a series of questions that focus first on current scripts circulating within communities, societies and sub-culture groups, to self-reflection and critique of current behaviour, and then to ways in which the status quo might be changed, participants are provided an opening for discussions of the effects of culture, inequality and poverty on opportunity, resources and behaviour. So far SNI has been used in three research projects focussed on teenage parenting, youth risk behavior and experiences of university. SNI has the potential to reframe research to become a vehicle for youth emancipation in which youth agency, community engagement and existing resources from social networks may be appropriated.

SNI has been ideologically influenced by Paulo Freire who outlined the relationship between knowledge and emancipation. Freire talks about the only way the poor and oppressed could control the naming of their world was if they were conscientised and engaged in dialogue about the conditions of their oppression with the view to transform it. Theoretically, SNI draws on the principles of social network analysis, participatory action research, motivational interviewing and nudge theory. Additionally, SNI is framed as an emancipatory method due to its potential to access, engage with and address issues of concern within communities. Central to SNI is the belief that people in communities have knowledge about their communities, which Butz and Besio (2004) described as 'transcultural knowers'.

Since its initial use in the study on teenage fathers in 2009, SNI has gone through an evolution. Over time we've developed SNI into a template and formula that can be repeated across different circumstances and contexts. There are 8 stages in a Social Network Interview. This deliberate structure groups questions conceptually. A structured interview schedule/guide supports the novice researcher through a series of questions that focus first on an opening declarative statement that sets the scene for the interview, then an ice-breaker that contextualises the research and situates the interviewee, followed by a discussion of current scripts circulating within communities, societies and sub-culture groups. The second half of the template elevates the discussion by prompting an evaluation of the participants' external agency (i.e. social context) and internal agency (i.e. internal resources and identity), followed

by an invitation to both parties to develop strategies to flourish and ending with questions that attempt to create advantageous linkages and social connections.

I. Choose appropriate people to interview. Choose individuals relevant to the topic being researched. The aim here is to speak to a range of people at different social levels in order to expose participant-researchers to a wide network from whom they can potentially learn or find support.

II. Declarative statement (introduces the subject for discussion). This opening declarative statement makes clear the specific issue the study is concerned with and sets the tone for the interview.

III. Public attitudes (external agency and building a discussion about community and norms on the topic). These questions serve as ice breakers – they should relax the interviewee. The aim here is to build rapport and to get to know their context while shaping discussion about community and norms including current scripts circulating within communities, societies and sub-culture groups.

IV. Role of institutions, ideology, context, community. These questions elevate the discussion by prompting an evaluation of the participants' external agency (i.e. social context). The goal of this second group of questions aim is to evaluate social context and external agency through unpacking what about the particular topic at hand can and cannot be changed.

V. Transformational message (inviting constructive analysis of participant-researcher's current behaviour; to develop internal agency). This third stage calls for invites constructive analysis from both the participant-researcher interviewer and the interviewee. The aim here is to ask specific questions with regard to internal agency i.e. internal resources and identity, community and/or cultural and gendered norms are asked. A level of reflection is expected as the participant-researcher interviewer is invited to question their (sometimes risky) behaviours.

VI. Talking about peer and/or gendered norms (class, race, culture) to differentiate between internal agency and systemic change needed. These questions invite the participants to glean the relationship between larger systemic contexts (social) and individual conduct/resources in order to find points of connection and disjuncture.

VII. Developing strategies for success, behaviour change, new realities. Once those behaviours are discussed, the fourth group of questions invite the interviewer (with the interviewee's help) to develop strategies to recognise and overcome barriers (and behaviours) identified in previous sections those behaviours. This what makes SNI not only interventionist, but a tool that inspires moments of self-directed action through guided dialogue.

VIII. Recap and referral (enlarge social network and create useful linkages for researcher). The last group of questions are intended to, after recognition, point the participant-interviewer to social networks or practices that are valuable. The aim here is not only motivational but also promotes information sharing with the view to develop agency (or collective co-agency) and increase social and cultural capital. These questions are attempting to create advantageous linkages and social connections for the participant-researcher.

SNI is a framework that can be extended to work with other marginalised groups around issues such as work, displacement, mental health and even civic engagement, amongst others. SNIs

are not meant to be a standalone method, they work best when integrated with other methods for facilitating change – they are intended to instigate change but do so in connection with other methods. Social Network Interviewing is part of the growing pool of research that puts participants at the centre of transforming their marginality. By encouraging open and reflective communication about difficult topics, especially issues of power and oppression, gender, poverty and inequality broadly, Social Network Interviewing, helps researcher-participants build skills for developing and maintaining relationships with people who may not be “like them”, allowing all of those involved to work together in their communities towards social justice for everyone. Youth have the capacity to help change systems, and to offer suggestions on how the policies and practices which affect their lives are analysed and understood – SNI innocuously excavates such suggestions. This is empowering for young people in that the identification fostered by dialogue in SNI, ensures that young people do not blame themselves for many of the constraints they experience – which so often leads to hopelessness, anti-social behaviour and avolition – the loss of will to act (Swartz, 2009). We offer it as a key contribution towards emancipation of both those researching and being researched in the Global South and beyond.

The article is called Social Network Interviewing: A Southern methodological innovation that aims at maximising emancipation and will be published in the Oxford Handbook of Global South Youth Studies. Published by Oxford University Press that hopefully comes out before 2020 is up.