



HSRC
Human Sciences
Research Council

Social Network Interviewing

*THEORY, METHOD AND REPRESENTATION- Global South Youth Studies
Community of Practice Seminar*

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What is social network interviewing?



Social Network Interviewing (SNI) is a **methodological research and intervention innovation**:

- Involves **interviews conducted by research participants** with members of their community and networks **without the presence of the researcher**.
- ...has as its goal **some form of intervention or emancipation** for those who are participating.

Why social network interviewing?



- It is a **reaction** to extractive, non-collaborative and objectifying research - Global North research.
- Helps the interviewer and interviewee gain new insight and potentially change their understanding - **intervention**.
- An alternative to the standard interviewing technique that could address shortfalls - **emancipatory** possibilities.
- Helps us understand behaviour by focusing attention on the **relationships between individuals and society**.
- Creates opportunities for the participants to engage in **self-evaluation**, in relation to those impacted by their choices and actions.
- SNI **spreads the benefits** participants accrue from their participation in activities related to the formal research process, **to the larger community**.
- Provides space for discussions of the **effects of culture, poverty and inequality** on opportunity and behavior.

SNI AIMS



- 1) **Helps participants marshal their thoughts** about a particular issue, converting those thoughts into a critical mind set;
- 2) Exposes participants to a wider **network**;
- 3) **Facilitates helpful exchange** between participants and relevant community members;
- 4) **Develops** participant **capitals** through this exchange;
- 5) **Promotes identification and information sharing** among marginalised or disadvantaged young people and;
- 6) **Promotes reflection** for the purpose of positive internal/external and individual/collective action in participants
- 7) **Capacity/skills** development

Theoretical Influences

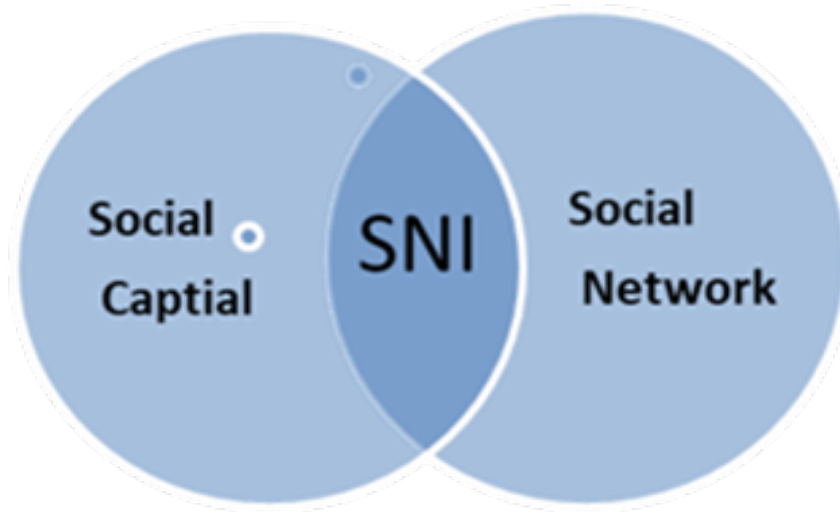


- **Social Network Analysis** (Vera and Schupp 2006; Wasserman and Faust 1994)
- **Participatory Action Research** (Hawkins 2015; Kaukko and Fertig 2016)
- **Motivational Interviewing** (Miller and Rollnick 2002)
- **Nudge theory** (Thaler and Sunstein 2009; Kusters and van der Heijden 2015; Bradbury et al. 2013)
- **Emancipatory Research** – community (Ledwith 2007; Robinson & Meerkotter 2003; Swartz and Nyamnjoh, 2018)

Social Network Analysis



- Based on the belief that **individuals are connected by linkages** through which information, cultural norms and other social resources pass through.
- The extent and nature of individuals, organisations or communities **connections and relations aids in understanding the social worlds**, including the characteristics or nature of those **relational ties**.
- Widen networks to acquire **capitals**





Participatory Action Research

1. **“Recognises** the value of **engaging** in the research process those who are intended to be the beneficiaries, users and **stakeholders** of research” (Biggs)
2. **Key feature - location of power**, commitment to the democratisation & demystification of scientific research
3. **Community** members as knowledgeable **collaborators**
4. **Underlying values** - action-oriented, dialogue, relevant and iterative, justice (Lewin – ‘The Northern Tradition’)
5. **Core elements:** Mutual respect and trust, accountability and reflexivity, participative and interactive, placing the participant at the centre (Freire – The ‘Southern’ tradition)

Motivational Interviewing



Motivational interviewing is an interpersonal process - the product of an **interaction between people**.

“Motivation for change can not only be influenced by but in a very real sense arises from an interpersonal context” - Miller and Rollnick 2002

- Similarly SNIs place value on the **interpersonal exchange** between the participant-interviewer and the interviewee.

Motivational interviewing is

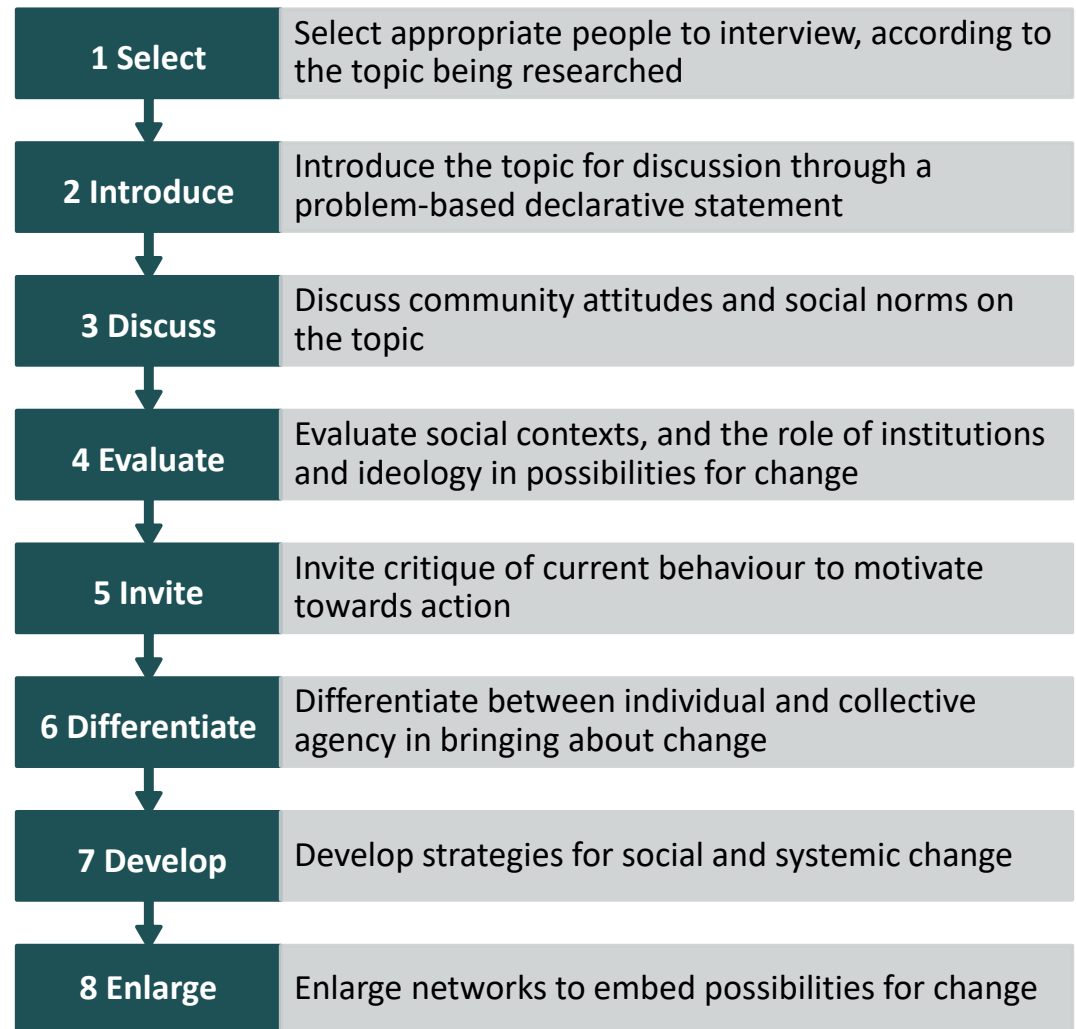
“about helping to free people from the ambivalence that entraps them in repetitive cycles of self-defeating or self-destructive behaviour” - Miller and Rollnick 2002

Nudge Theory



- ‘Choice architecture’ that alters people’s behavior in a predictable way without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives.
- Nudges seek to change behaviour through a wide range of interventions – young people.
- Suggests that individuals do not always make the choices that would benefit them most... therefore everyday decision making can and should be framed in particular ways to encourage (or ‘nudge’) people to choose in advantageous way.
- SNIs nudge participants to develop a network by facilitating and encouraging them to interact with people who they would otherwise never interact with and from whom they can potentially gain knowledge, a resource, economic opportunity, key information etc.

Eight stages of Social Network Interviewing



	Study of young fathers in Teenage Tata (Swartz & Bhana, 2009)	Youth risk-taking in loveLife (Swartz et al. 2011)	Strategies for student success in Studying while black (Swartz et al. 2018)
Aims of the study	<p>1) To understand how young men living in poverty, and those involved with them, experience fatherhood;</p> <p>2) To understand the factors that help or hinder young men's engagement in the parenting of their children.</p>	<p>1) To understand the value that young people associate with loveLife (a youth focused HIV prevention initiative in South Africa);</p> <p>2) The factors that impact their life choices;</p> <p>3) Their tolerance of risk.</p>	<p>1) To understand the social factors that aid or hinder students' success;</p> <p>2) How race, class and gender impact on students' perceptions and experiences of success;</p> <p>3) How students use personal and social agency to create opportunities and success.</p>
Target population/target group	27 'Black' and 'Coloured' young men who were aged between 14 and 20 at the time they first became fathers.	61 youth aged between 18 and 23 who were involved in a loveLife programme.	80 first year students enrolled in university
Advantages of SNI	<p>1) To assist in building the relationship and establishing rapport between young fathers and their community.</p> <p>2) To provide a means of learning for young fathers that they might otherwise not have received.</p>	<p>1) To assist youth participants to reflect over time on their initial answers</p> <p>2) To help youth reflect on problems associated with opportunity and risk</p> <p>3) To establish social connections</p>	<p>1) Inspire identification</p> <p>2) Motivate</p> <p>3) Promote information sharing</p> <p>4) Foster community support</p>

Studying while Black

I. Select Kinds of people to be interviewed (Choose 3-5):

1. A person from your home town who never went to university
2. A student you consider more privileged than you
3. A student you consider less privileged than you
4. A staff contact from your previous school
5. A person in a university leadership position
6. A recent graduate that you know
7. A student like you
8. A person who works at student support services
9. A student who dropped out of university this past year
10. A person you consider to have helped you get to varsity
11. A person you consider to have helped you over this last year of university
12. A family member who has been to university

II. Introduce	<i>Many students struggle to both enrol at and successfully complete university. This research study aims to find out why this is so and what could be done about it.</i>
III. Discuss	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Why is it important for young South Africans to succeed at university?2. In your opinion, what are some of the struggles facing university students in South Africa, and what are some of the reasons for these struggles?
IV. Evaluate	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. In your opinion, what affects someone's success at university?2. Who is responsible for students succeeding at University?
V. Invite	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. From what you know of me (or students in general), what do I do that stops (sabotages) me from succeeding at varsity? What should I be doing?

VI. Differentiate	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. How does <i>racism and gender discrimination</i> affect student's lives?2. How is <i>success</i> at university affected by <i>people's backgrounds</i>? (Prompt: gender, education, race, social class)
VII. Develop	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. In your opinion, <i>who should be helping students succeed at university</i>, and what should they be doing to help?2. What steps have you taken (or are you taking) in order to be successful in your life?
VIII. Enlarge	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <i>Who else should I talk to</i> that might be able to help me to be successful at university?



“It was so helpful to **interact with other students**; it helped me get different perspectives especially on how to deal with stuff that we generally face as students. **Some of the interviewees had very helpful tips that I also applied to my life.**” (UJSTUD8)

“When I went to student counselling...she told me that some of the things that stop us student’s succeeding - it’s the fact that we do not use the school resources. **Some of us don’t even know that some of those things exist.**” (CPUTSTUD4)

Limitations



Training

“...Four people didn’t want me to interview them because ...maybe they didn’t understand me or what, because we disagreed when we came to the signature. They said where are you taking our signatures”?

“When I went there it was like ...I am doing this research for HSRC and I am going to record you. ‘Record me no! I don’t want you to record me but I can answer, you can take notes and I will sign the indemnity but you cannot record’”.

“It was the first time I interviewed a person. For my first interview I repeated it more than five times...”



Collaboration

The **SNI interview schedule should be developed in collaboration or consultation with the participant-interviewer.** This is why SNI is framed as emancipatory... it has a transformative intention that places the researcher-participant at the centre.

Data Presentation

Besides co-creating questions, another way to ensure that researcher-participants are always at the centre of the SNI activity is to **debrief** and have a **feedback** session with them after the SNI exercise about their experience.



Reliability of Data

Although trained, research-participants conduct SNIs unsupervised. This poses a **potential risk** for both the research participant and the person being interviewed, particularly where an inappropriate issue may come up and the two in interaction, may lack the expertise to properly resolve the issue. Without the authority of the researcher, the interview activity is **unpredictable** and as a result, there are **ethical considerations** that need to be observed. As with any other research with human participants, ethical permission must be sought from relevant authorities in order to authenticate the social network interviewers when approaching potential participants

REMEMBER...



Confidentiality

In the case of SNI, the point must be made in the ethics proposal that **confidentiality is not essential as SNI aims to build dialogue and social links**. Instead, participants must be reminded not to disclose any personally sensitive information in the exchange.

Compensation

Offer compensation to participants for every SNI completed. In Global South contexts especially, the mobility and economic capacity of young people cannot be taken for granted. In order to conduct interviews, sometimes travel or subsistence is needed. Compensation is therefore critical to help participant-researchers complete the task at hand.

Global South Youth Studies



- SNI can be extended to work with other marginalized groups around issues such as work, displacement, mental health, and even civic engagement etc.
- SNIs bring together research and intervention and form part of a Southern approach to knowledge production.
- SNI is a rich addition to existing research and intervention methods... an evolving contribution toward the emancipation of both those researching and being researched in the Global South and beyond.



Thank you

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