

Review:

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**Daphne M. Keats (2001). Interviewing: A Practical Guide for Students and Professionals.** Buckingham: Open University Press, 162 pages, Prize: £15.99, ISBN: 0-335-20667-0

**Key words:**  
interviewing,  
interviewing-  
respondent  
relationship, inter-  
rater reliability

**Abstract:** KEATS' book "Interviewing: A practical guide for students and professionals" introduces interviewing and covers aspects such as why and what type of interviews can be used, before providing the reader with a step-by-step guide of what the important features are when interviewing and the difficulties that can be encountered. KEATS' book was considered to be extremely valuable and any criticisms made, were mere suggestions for future improvement. As KEATS said herself "It is not possible in a book of this scope to cover all kinds of interviews and all levels of interviewing skill", however this book has been thought out very carefully and is an excellent guide for any reader who is interested in interviewing.

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### 1. Content Overview

"Interviewing: A practical guide for students and professionals" by Daphne KEATS provides the reader with a useful introduction to the field of interviewing in many diverse situations. As mentioned at the beginning of the book, Daphne KEATS is based at the University of Newcastle (Australia) and is Conjoint Associate Professor of Psychology. The aim of KEATS' book was to provide the reader with a course on interviewing by drawing on her own experiences, publications and teaching experiences—rather than a reference book on what interviewing is. The use of KEATS extensive experiences shines throughout the book, as she uses many examples to make theoretical issues become visible and alive to the reader. [1]

Before making any comment upon the content of KEATS book it is felt important to give an overview of what each chapter covers. Chapter 1 introduces the reader to interviewing in terms of why interviews are useful and when they are useful. Chapter 2 progresses into what types of interviews can be found within society as a whole, and discusses briefly applications, such as telephone interviewing, mass media interviews, job interviews, group interviewing, clinical interviews, and interviewing for research purposes. Then the book moves on to the importance of

the interviewer-respondent relationship in Chapter 3, by discussing important issues when opening an interview, such as factors affecting rapport, and then the development and closing of the interview. Empathy, sympathy and judgemental attitudes are further discussed within this chapter, before ending the chapter with a discussion of ethical considerations. Chapter 4 explains the importance of constructing questions and emphasises upon question format, wording and language style. In Chapter 5 KEATS discussed the structural aspects of interviewing, before discussing interpreting aspects of responses in Chapter 6. KEATS talks about the importance of interpreting the respondent's behaviour, an interviewer's interpretive skills, probing, and non-verbal messages. Chapter 7 discusses the use of interviewing in a research context, covering aspects such as the theoretical basis, sampling, pilot studies, reliability, validity, coding, preparation for analysis, qualitative analysis, and the use of interviewing in cross-cultural research. In Chapter 8 interviewing in an organisational setting is explained, i.e. in terms of personnel selection, the performance appraisal interview and the dismissal interview. Chapter 9 covers interviewing children, followed by discussing interviewing adolescents in Chapter 10, and then she highlights differences in interviewing the aged in Chapter 11. After discussing interviewing different age groups, KEATS moved on to talk about interviewing people with disabilities in Chapter 12 and talked about interviewing across cultures in Chapter 13, in terms of the difficulties that can occur and considerations that have to be made prior to interview. In Chapter 14 KEATS addressed the issue of difficult cases that can occur when interviewing, such as the hostile respondent, the anxious respondent or prejudice that may be present when interviewing. A further aspect of interviewing that KEATS considered was interviewing in a stressful situation (Chapter 15), before giving a general overview in her final Chapter (Chapter 16). [2]

One of the most interesting points of this book is the consideration for interviewing not merely in a research context, but also the consideration of interviewing in every day living and organisational settings, such as news reports, pop star interviews and job interviews. I felt this made the book more approachable to the younger generation of readers. Furthermore I enjoyed the frequent use of questions throughout the book, as it keeps the reader interested and it may actually cover questions that the reader would have asked themselves whilst reading the book or whilst using interviews. KEATS asks the simplest questions, such as "How do you create an atmosphere which will encourage, but not bias, answers to your questions?" However often the simplest questions are asked by people who are new to interviewing and such questions are often overlooked by professionals. KEATS both poses and answers such queries by describing in detail the importance of forming good rapport between the interviewer and the respondent, by discussing the importance of spoken and body language, the importance of the setting and attitudes. [3]

Another particularly enjoyable aspect was the frequent reference to cross-cultural differences when interviewing. KEATS particular interest and knowledge in this concept did become apparent, which can be further seen in some of her past publications (KEATS 1986, 2000). [4]

The book covers useful practical advice throughout, which may help people using interviewing to overcome difficulties they may encounter. Furthermore this book may provide an encouragement and confidence for students to incorporate interviewing into their research, rather than merely conducting interviews using questionnaires. [5]

## 2. Critical Review

While KEATS admitted it was impossible to incorporate all aspects of interviewing in a book of this scope, there are some minimal improvements that could be made. Whilst the structure of the book was generally thought out very carefully, I personally feel it might have been useful to discuss the importance of body language alongside the importance of attitudes when forming rapport with the respondent in Chapter 3. Furthermore it would have been interesting to discuss the importance of setting for the interview for good rapport. [6]

In Chapter 7, KEATS discussed issues of reliability, validity and analysis. An interesting concept that was missing at this point was the debate surrounding inter-rater reliability. Personally I feel this would have been an important aspect at this point for discussion, despite mixed reviews about this concept. It would have been interesting to highlight that some positivist researchers believe it can be used to overcome the problem of research bias by asking independent people to grade transcript responses (RICE & EZZY, 1999). Positivist researchers believe inter-rater reliability to decrease bias and to increase validity and reliability. However modernist or realist-interpretive researchers would argue claims around objectivity in qualitative research based on inter-rater reliability make the same mistake as traditional statistical methods by assuming there is one true meaning to text (RICE & EZZY, 1999). While it becomes apparent there is a debate around the benefits of inter-rater reliability it is an important concept for discussion in a book of this scope, as some researchers may believe it could increase the validity and reliability of their analysis. (For further interest, RICE and EZZY's 1999 published book on qualitative research methods discusses this point.) [7]

KEATS discussed in Chapter 11 that old people do not like to write replies, which is why interviews could be a more beneficial tool in contrast to questionnaires for example. However it would have been interesting to discuss whether the same is true for children, especially those with behavioural problems, such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Personally I found the children I interviewed with a diagnosis of ADHD were not able to write, or did not have the attention span to concentrate on reading and writing, which is why interviews were more beneficial. [8]

As I work in a field of mental health and have a particular interest in this field, I would have found it of great interest if the difficulties and challenges of interviewing people with mental health problems had been discussed within this book. Discussing interviewing in this context may have been appealing to many people working in the mental health field but also to the vast amount of

Psychology students particularly interested in becoming Clinical Psychologists. However this is not a criticism, but merely a suggestion for the next edition maybe. [9]

### 3. Evaluation

KEATS appears to have given the book much consideration, by incorporating theory, practical application, diversity in terms of age and culture, and complexities. The book kept the reader interested and facilitated the reader with an intense knowledge and thoughts about interviewing or their own interviewing experiences. As I have conducted interviews with children with a diagnosis of ADHD and adults who'd experienced cancer through their close friend, I benefited from the book, as it provided me with reassurance that aspects I felt were important during my studies were important in a research context. KEATS' practical application, in terms of what context and groups interviewing can be used, and step-by-step guide, explaining exactly what steps need to be taken to conduct a successful interview, covers details that other textbooks do not often discuss, as they mostly focus merely on the type of questions one can ask and on aspects such as reliability and validity. General textbooks on qualitative research (RICE & EZZY 1999, BOWLING 1997) fail to comment on the importance of forming a relationship between the interviewer and respondent, and further fail to discuss the differences of interviewing children to adults and hence fail to provide the researcher with practical advice when conducting the interviews. KEATS' book in contrast provides the student in particular with the practical advice they need to carry out interviews. However at this point I would like to say that not all textbooks fail to comment on such issues, as some textbooks do discuss the importance of the differences and sensitivities of interviewing children (EISER & TWAMLEY 1999). I have yet to come across another textbook that covers the extensive array of topics with as much practical application as KEATS does in her book. While KEATS herself states "[i]t is not possible in a book of this scope to cover all kinds of interviews and all levels of interviewing skill", this book is near to achieve such an aim. [10]

As the book is sub-divided into chapters, the book can be used as a reference guide, as well as a course in interviewing. I would recommend this book to anybody wanting to use interviewing in a research context, but also in an everyday context, such as in an organisational context. Anybody wanting to learn about interviewing as a technique, or who uses interviewing should read this book, to either increase their knowledge or to reflect on whether they have considered all the important aspects that KEATS highlights in her book. This book is useful either as a checklist for professionals or a course in interviewing for anybody interested in this field. [11]

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## Citation

Froede, Emmeline (2001). Review: Daphne M. Keats (2001). Interviewing: A Practical Guide for Students and Professionals [11 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 3(1), Art. 8, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs020183>.

Revised 2/2007