WANDERING THE CORRIDORS OF POWER

Stanley Bach
Department of Government
University of Massachusetts
Amherst, Massachusetts
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This essay discusses research concerning the reactions among members of the United States Congress to contemporary political protest. The ultimate goal of this study was to ascertain what certain elected members of the American political elite perceive to be the limits of appropriate and effective political opposition. The research involved approximately one hundred personal interviews conducted with members of both the Senate and the House of Representatives in Washington, D. C., between June and December of 1969. The respondents were selected randomly and presented with a series of open-ended questions; their replies, as recorded and transcribed, constituted the primary data for analysis.

Introduction

A cartoon in a 1969 publication of the American Political Science Association depicts a United States Congressman dashing up the Capitol steps--business suit discarded for track suit and official papers scattered in the wind--all this to escape a perplexed student who explains, "I merely said to the Congressman that I was a student taking a survey...."[1] When this appeared, I was in the process of interviewing one hundred Members of the 91st Congress, discovering for myself the truth behind the caricature: that the recent surge of scholarly interest in the Congress has become at best a mixed blessing to the Members of the Congress.

This was the primary theme which the cartoon was intended to illustrate. "Many Congressmen, Congressional staff members and researchers have perceived the corridors of the Capitol and Congressional office buildings becoming crowded with students, interns, teachers, and researchers of all kinds."[2] Perhaps even more than most other legislatures, the United States Congress has been blessed or damned by a number of characteristics which make it especially attractive for academic research. It has a relatively large membership of men and women who share common tasks, but often with different perspectives, for different purposes, and from different positions of power and status. Its Members tend to act independently of each other, at least to the extent that both individual behavior and collective decisions are complex enough to satiate observors with the most byzantine tastes; yet some aspects of its structure and decision-making processes lend themselves well to the search for quantifiable regularities. Moreover, the Congress is constantly involved with decisions and non-decisions which appear as if they should be important. For these reasons (among others, no doubt), an increasing number of students, at all levels, have chosen to study the Congress and to investigate their chosen slice of Congressional reality by personally interrogating its Members.

In 1958, Charles O. Jones reported interviewing almost all the members of the House Agriculture Committee.[3] During the following year, and more remarkably, James A. Robinson and his associates completed seventy-five interviews with Congressmen during one month or "approximately twenty man-days."[4] Yet, also in 1959, Lewis A. Dexter remarked that "some Congressmen were complaining about the frequency and the 'stupidity' of some academic interviews."[5] Dexter concluded that the increasing number of interview requests may be exhausting the time and patience of the Members of Congress, and his concern has since become more widely shared. There have even been suggestions that the research enthusiasm of individual scholars may have to be co-ordinated, if not restrained, before many more Representatives and Senators conclude that their simplest recourse is merely to refuse all such interview requests. Certainly any future student of the Congress should ask himself if he cannot rely on other primary or secondary sources of information. Still, there will always remain some questions which can only be answered on the basis of personal interviews. My experiences suggest that it is still possible to gather information directly from a rather large sample of Representatives and Senators, although the difficulties involved have undoubtedly multiplied in the last decade. A description of my research will suggest some of the problems which arise, as well as some of the strategies which may succeed or fail.

Deciding What Not to Do

Before focusing on the process of interviewing in the Congress, it might be instructive to consider an unsuccessful attempt at a more unusual research technique--an attempt at direct and intensive observation of the activities of Congressmen and their staffs. At least in the development of legislative research, personal contact by the student with his subject has come to be associated almost solely with the process of interviewing.[6] This research strategy undoubtedly has been productive, but only within rather circumscribed limits. If the focus of study is some facet of legislative behavior, then interviews can only provide data on perceptions or recollections of behavior. Even if the focus of study is on the perceptions or attitudes themselves, they are of interest presumably because they will be reflected in action, and this crucial linkage cannot be demonstrated satisfactorily by use of the interview alone. At best, interviewing provides an acceptable surrogate when actual behavior is not available for scrutiny; at worst, it leaves open the question of whether there is any likely connection between interview responses and anything else.

One recent direction of legislative research which illustrates this problem is the attempt to define the range and distribution of legislative role orientations. From large samples of interview responses, several teams of researchers have drawn plausible conclusions about the ways in which members of state and national legislatures perceive both their responsibilities and their relationships with their constituents and other groups directly interested in legislative decisions.[7] Originally, I sought to explore the relationship between such statements and several aspects of individual behavior, at the same time asking to what extent different conceptions of Congressional functions were implicit in the activities of individual Representatives.

My intention was to explore the ways in which a number of Congressmen organize the activities of their staffs and allocate their own time, to the extent that both are within their control. Recent discussions of the Congress and its contemporary crisis have given new emphasis to legislative oversight and constituency service, perhaps in reaction to the Congress' apparent inability to legislate efficiently and creatively. I hoped to discover whether, in fact, the legislative function does dominate the activities of individual legislators (if not of the legislature collectively). Further, I was curious whether the interview-derived role orientations would be reflected in the work choices of different Members. For example, do Representatives who define their constituency as the entire nation devote less attention to constituency service? Or do Congressmen who perceive themselves as the "trustees" of their constituents' interests concentrate more on legislative deliberations than their other colleagues? In some respects, these questions now seem naive, but not nearly as naive as my expectation that they could be answered.

Before committing myself to an extended period of research, I decided that it would be wise to conduct a brief exploratory study, pre-testing both my ideas and my research procedures. I was fortunate enough to secure the willing and gracious co-operation of the Honorable George Bush, then Representative from Texas. Mr. Bush permitted me to spend a week in his Washington office, monitoring his activities and those of his staff members. I was prepared to collect exhaustive data on what he and his staff did during that week, and on how these activities could be distributed among categories of legislative functions. In the process, I assumed that I would become acclimated to the internal life of a Congressional office, and, as a result, that I would be able to anticipate many of the problems that would arise during my research proper.

During the course of that week, however, I learned steadily and progressively that my proposed research was impossible, or at least beyond my competence. On Monday, I discovered that the Congressional office work routine is not structured in a way which lends itself to ready compartmentalization--most staff members engage in a variety of different activities briefly and return to them only intermittently. On Tuesday, I discovered that my very presence, much less my monitoring activities, was causing some confusion and resentment (largely deserved) among the Congressman's staff whose cooperation was essential to the success of my study. I found myself unwilling or unable to accept this cost even for so short a period as a week. On Wednesday, therefore, I decided to concentrate solely on the activities of the Congressman himself. In doing so, I discovered that my predetermined coding categories were inadequate--not because they were the wrong categories, but because they implied clearer distinctions and greater structure than really existed. The problem was a basic one of conceptualization--of assuming that complex behavior could be captured, adequately and accurately, in any limited set of mutually exclusive categories. Also, on Thursday, it became clear that my observations would inevitably remain incomplete, despite my best efforts. There were conversations to which I could not be privy. Further, a really acute understanding of the reasons for the Congressman's behavior would have required almost constant cross-examination, which would have violated my appreciation of his hospitality and my constant awareness of the status gulf separating us. Finally, on Friday, I learned that, these problems aside, my project was impractical because my several applications for financial support had been rejected. More experienced scholars apparently could anticipate the difficulties I was just encountering.[8]

Literally, then, in the course of a week, I became convinced that the demands of my planned research were unreasonable. And if for no other reason, this discovery made the pre-test experiment invaluable. During the same period, I also arranged to speak with several former Representatives still residing in the Washington area. Because my projected research plans called for a series of interviews to complement my own observations, I hoped that these sessions would point up the deficiencies of the interview protocol I had devised *a priori*. They did prove helpful in this way, and they also served to increase my sensitivity to the difficulties of summarizing and coding interview responses. I presented to each of my respondents all of the questions used by some of the earlier research teams to investigate legislative role orientations. This included both their primary questions, as well as other secondary and reserve questions relating to the same subject. As I probed more deeply into their role choices, distinctions which had appeared sharp and clear in principle became increasingly blurred and muddied in practice. Indeed, when these interviews were concluded, I could have defended classifying each respondent in any one of the established role categories.

If any moral might be drawn from such a limited number of interviews, it is probably that the distinctiveness of such attitudinal categories is primarily an artifact of superficial data collection. These roles might best be understood not as discrete choices nor as distinct points on a continuum, but as different demands and alternatives which each legislator reconciles for himself or herself in different ways under different circumstances.[9] I am also struck by the fact that, as this is being written, I am much more convinced of this conclusion than I was immediately after conducting the interviews on which it is based.

Ironically, this may suggest another caveat about the analysis of interview data: as time passes after the period of data collection, what were originally merely indications or tendencies all too often gradually become transformed into empirically supported and unequivocal conclusions. Sensitivity to data is difficult to maintain--partly because it depends on the immediacy of the research experience, and partly because it imposes nagging uncertainties and residual doubts. But this sensitivity must be reflected in the presentation of research findings, especially because most readers lack the preparation to know when conclusions are over-stated and when distinctions are over-emphasized. Perhaps the canons of empirical rigor and self-discipline should demand that we re-read all our interview notes and transcripts with a scoffing eye before releasing any new truth to the world.

It is easy and comforting to imagine that the development of a research design closely resembles a common caricature of "The Scientific Method:" an engaging theoretical question, hypothesis, or model is generated; the ideal means for subjecting it to empirical verification are sought and discovered; data are then collected and evaluated, leading to confirmation or at least to re-formulation. In this way, every adequate research design reflects the best of scientific procedure, and may eventually produce a critical jigsaw piece in the multi-dimensional construction of a science of politics. Naturally, in practice, this "scientific" process is often honored in the breach. All research projects are subject to the influence of confining and often unanticipated limitations, of which shortages of time and money are only the most obvious. In my case, I had already committed myself to a specific period of months for research, and it was now too late to apply for massive research support. Also, I found that I had already made an irreversible personal commitment to one site for research, the Congress. In the few months between the pre-test I have just described and the beginning of the research I shall discuss, I never did seriously consider modifying this focus. Moreover, my second research attempt was conducted and completed almost exactly as it had been designed. It is usually necessary to modify, if not radically alter, research plans when once confronted with the realities of the field situation. This is an inevitable and usually desirable adaptation to new information, possibilities, and limitations. That this did not happen to me probably reflects the value of my pre-test experience, but perhaps also the rigidity of my pre-commitment.[10]

Deciding What to Do

Only in part does the choice of a research project reflect long-standing interests and gradually developing plans. In an ideal world, it might be possible to formulate a proposal only after careful planning and exhaustive preliminary research, and then to structure resources and circumstances to conform to its requirements. However, this is rarely, if ever, possible. Instead, and whether consciously or not, most research projects are designed to conform to a number of different but equally limiting requirements. The time and money available for research are usually severely limited and beyond much control. When research can begin (or must begin) and when it must end restrict what can be attempted and in what ways. General intentions and even specific plans must often be formulated to conform to imposed and inflexible deadlines (as for grant applications, for example). Naturally, what we choose to do reflects what we consider to be important and worth doing, but only within the limits of our prior knowledge and training. Instead of asking, "What background and skills must I acquire to do what I want to do?", we must usually ask, "What can I do, given the background and skills I already have?" If this latter question is rarely posed explicitly, it is because we naturally tend to gravitate toward what is already familiar and comfortable.

The decision, then, of what to do and how to do it is usually made from among a range of alternatives limited by at least four considerations: time, money, background, and training. The optimal choice is the one which fits most snugly within these limitations, and which then seems so natural as to appear almost preordained.

I returned to an idea for a study which satisfied these limitations and which I had already briefly considered. I chose to investigate Congressional reactions to different forms of contemporary political protest. If democratic stability benefits from the political elite's adherence to the rules of the game of democratic politics, then how does the elite define these rules? Specifically, what do they consider to be the limits of appropriate and effective political opposition? In the context of recent events, what has been the reaction of the public officials to whom the many acts of protest have been addressed? Here was a series of questions of some theoretical and contemporary importance, and on which original data could be collected with some predictable assurance of success. Further, they were questions of democratic theory and ethics which I could not answer myself. Perhaps the responses of the Congressmen would suggest a coherent and acceptable personal posture toward the same questions.

I never doubted that the most appropriate research technique was the personal interview. This was the kind of field experience I sought. In fact, my belief that the questions I chose to explore could best be approached by interviewing was undoubtedly one of their primary attractions. Further, there did not seem to be any realistic alternative. Reliance on speeches made in the Congress and elsewhere would have posed several different problems. First, I would have been limited to the statements which I could obtain, with no guarantee that they would in any sense be representative or addressed to the same questions in the same way. Second, this would have been an inefficient process; there would have been no systematic or thorough way of gathering information. Finally, I would have been restricted to statements all made more or less for public consumption, but with no assurance that they were all made in the same kinds of contexts and in response to the same kinds of stimuli.[11]

Because I wished to draw some conclusions about the membership of the Congress as a whole, the problem of whom to interview was relatively uncomplicated. A random sample of some kind was necessary. The possibility of somehow stratifying this sample along one or more dimensions was attractive because it would have been a more efficient procedure, but there was little a priori basis for choosing the most discriminating dimensions--e.g., party, region, seniority, personal background, etc. Ultimately, I selected simple random samples of 100 Members of the House and 33 Members of the Senate, trying in this way to strike some practical balance between size of sample and size of universe, as well as between what seemed possible and what would have been desirable.[12] At this stage, I had the benefit of earlier studies of the Congress which supplied some advice as to how large a sample I could reasonably hope to interview in a relatively short period of time, and as to the kinds of analytical techniques I could probably impose on the resulting data.

More difficult was the question of what to ask and how to ask it. One basic decision was the choice between concentrated probing on a limited number of questions and more superficial coverage of an entire dimension of attitudes. I eventually chose the latter strategy for both theoretical and practical reasons. If I was trying to determine the perceived limits of political opposition, I could not very well limit the scope of my inquiry beforehand to only one or two forms of protest behavior. More importantly, I anticipated, although not fully, that Congressmen's responses would be rather superficial and that I would be uneasy probing for further thought and fuller explanations.

One way to avoid the latter problem would have been to ask only questions which would have elicited one of a small number of predetermined answers. In this way, I could have assured myself of unambiguous and comparable replies which would have lent themselves readily to classification and coding. I chose instead to rely on a series of twenty-four open-ended questions which allowed the respondents considerable freedom for maneuver--even, in a few cases, to the point of allowing them to define some of the terms of the questions for themselves. This inevitably complicated the later task of determining just what each respondent said, or meant to say, in response to each question (a greater problem in practice than in planning). It did, however, avoid the danger of my pre-conceptions being imposed on the research to the point of limiting in advance the replies I might receive. Also, after several attempts, I concluded that closed-ended questions on this complex subject could not be phrased in such a way that I would be willing to answer them myself without frustration at not being permitted to explain and amplify my responses. I felt certain that almost all my respondents would encounter the same frustration, perhaps to the point of jeopardizing their cooperation altogether.

Arranging to Do It

When I returned to Washington to begin asking these questions, I had already made some arrangements which I anticipated, correctly, would facilitate my research. During my earlier pre-test, and from discussions with other students of the Congress, I realized that conducting the interviews would undoubtedly involve many delays, postponements, and cancellations. One way of minimizing the resulting strain and inconvenience was to secure a "base camp" on Capitol Hill. I was more fortunate than I then knew to approach the

Administrative Assistant of Congressman Abner J. Mikva of Illinois, a Representative for whom I had campaigned and whom I expected would be sympathetic to academic research generally and to my intentions specifically. The Congressman and the members of his staff were kind enough to provide me with a desk in an adjacent annex office.[13] More importantly, I was given access to a telephone line which proved invaluable for scheduling and re-scheduling appointments. Continuing the expeditionary metaphor, I could reconnoiter the accessibility of my respondents painlessly and I could set off to conduct interviews without straying too far from my sources of supply and (ego)support. Also, with these facilities, I could easily take advantage of unexpected openings in respondents' schedules and keep in close contact with the offices of Representatives and Senators whom I had not yet interviewed.

During the period of my research, I discovered unexpected benefits from this arrangement, which was originally intended simply for convenience. When not actively involved in my own project, I was able to observe and occasionally assist the Congressman and his staff. By doing so, I gained further insights into the activities of Congress and of a Congressional office. I could begin to appreciate the demands on a Representative's time, a realization which led me to accept my own delays in arranging appointments with better grace and patience. I was also able to follow rather closely the current activities of the House and Senate. This meant that I could begin to gauge the most opportune times for arranging and conducting interviews. Furthermore, as a volunteer staff member, I was able to meet other Congressional aides who were generous with their advice and assistance.[14]

Because I expected to spend six months completing my planned interviews, I staggered my initial contacts with my respondents over a two month period. At the outset, I did not know how easily appointments could be made or how adequate my interview schedule would be, and this partial delay afforded me an opportunity to modify my research plans as experience accumulated. As I sought successive interviews, each respondent received a letter in which I introduced myself, described my intentions in general terms, and requested their cooperation. These letters were written on university stationery in the hope that this might cause them to receive more than perfunctory attention. With the assistance of an automatic typewriter, individually typed letters could be prepared at little cost and effort. One week after mailing each batch of introductory letters, I visited the Representatives' offices, either to make an appointment or at least to establish some personal rapport with their appointment secretaries. (In the case of Senators, with their much larger staffs, it usually proved much easier and much more economical to rely on personal contact by telephone.)

In some cases, I was able to make an appointment immediately and complete the interview within a week of the receipt of my letter. Most often, however, I was merely told of the Congressman's receptivity to my request and his willingness to meet with me at some unspecified future date. There then followed a series of periodic phone calls until the meeting was arranged or until it became obvious that the initial delay was intended as an absolute refusal in polite form. I found the most propitious time for arranging appointments to be late on Monday mornings, after the Congressman's weekly schedule had been determined but before his open hours had been otherwise allocated. I was careful to keep exact records of the history and status of my negotiations with each office--a procedure which became essential when I found myself seeking interviews with perhaps fifty Members simultaneously.

Not surprisingly, I was fully at the mercy of appointment secretaries, many of whom define their responsibility as protecting their employer from non-essential visitors. Although many respondents ultimately proved more receptive to me than their staff members, I found myself unwilling to challenge the secretaries' power and wisdom. Even if this meant accepting, more or less gracefully, a delay of a month or more between contacts, I concluded that a posture of apologetic persistence would prove most successful. (There is no way of knowing if my decision was wise. I might have experimented with a more aggressive approach, but the successes I was eventually enjoying made it seem a needless risk.) As weeks and months passed, some secretaries became irritated while others became more or less willing allies; in either case, I am convinced that a number of interviews were scheduled simply to end the annoyance of my polite nagging. Perhaps three months after the last of my introductory letters was mailed, I sent a second letter to the home addresses of the Representatives and Senators with whom I had been unable to secure appointments. In this way, I hoped to appeal to them directly and avoid the defensiveness of their secretaries. This strategy, however, was almost uniformly unsuccessful.

After one or two unsuccessful visits to each potential respondent's office, I chose to rely on a continuing series of telephone calls which I normally made every Monday morning unless advised differently by appointment secretaries. No more than two such calls were sufficient to arrange 49% of my interviews with Representatives and 24% of my interviews with Senators. As many as four more calls were necessary to secure an additional 20% of the interviews I had planned, and between 7 and 15 total calls were necessary in ten other cases. In addition, more than one appointment was necessary before 24 of my 95 total interviews could actually be conducted. As a result, almost one-half of the interviews I finally succeeded in obtaining required more than a month to arrange. In four cases, between 15 and 25 weeks elapsed between my first solicitations and final completion of the interviews.[15]

Committee meetings, quorum calls, teller and roll call votes, among other unexpected developments, were the most frequent reasons for postponement of appointments. In addition, it is exceptionally difficult for Congressmen to adhere strictly to a tightly planned daily calendar because when and for how long they will be engaged on the floor or in meetings are largely beyond their control. Legislative crises or the unexpected arrival of important constituents often force them to cancel the least obligatory of their commitments, and academic interviews inevitably fall into this category. As often as not, my appointments actually began between fifteen and thirty minutes after the time for which they were scheduled, just long enough to take the edge off my preparation and just long enough to make it extremely difficult for me to plan my own schedule with any assurance. In one case, rather than cancel our appointment, a considerate Representative arranged that we should conduct our interview before an audience of visiting 4-H Club members, probably with some effect on his responses and certainly with a disconcerting effect on my questioning.

Interviews were most often conducted during one of two periods during the day: either before committees met at 10:00 A.M. or late during the daily sessions of the House and Senate, between 3:00 and 5:00 P.M. These are the few hours during the day when Congressmen can work in their offices, relatively safe from legislative interruptions. As a result, these are also the few hours during which they must work with their staffs, answer their correspondence, meet with visitors, confer quietly with their colleagues, and do what little reading and research their schedules permit. Because the best times for interviews came at the beginning and end of each day, the value of having an office on the Hill to which I could retreat and wait became even greater than I had anticipated.

A substantial minority of interviews did occur during the middle of the day--between adjournment of committee meetings and beginning of the floor sessions, and during lulls in floor activity. These sessions were generally less successful because of more frequent interruptions and greater time pressures. Then, too, some of these meetings had to take place in the reception rooms off the House and Senate chambers, which are less quiet and congenial settings than the Members' own offices. On several occasions, I suggested to secretaries that my purposes would be better served if appointments could be postponed until a later, and more convenient, time. However, they were quick to inform me that I could not refuse one appointment and then still hope to receive another.

Doing It

Ultimately, I succeeded in meeting with 75% of the Representatives (75 of a 100 member sample) and 60% of the Senators (20 of a

33 member sample) with whom I sought interviews. When I concluded my research, there remained a number of Members with whose offices I was still negotiating, and it is likely that several more interviews could have been arranged if I had remained in Washington several weeks or months longer. My decision to conclude my research after precisely six months was essentially an arbitrary one, based on the limited value of achieving a slightly higher completion rate relative to the costs, especially in time, of doing so.

Among the 95 interviews I conducted, not all of them were equally complete. In my original research plans, I estimated that an average interview would require between 60 and 75 minutes. It soon became apparent, however, that this grossly over-estimated the amount of time that most Congressmen would make available to me. A few sessions did last an hour or more but most had to be terminated after between 25 and 35 minutes. (In two meetings with prominent and senior Southern conservatives, my appointments lasted only long enough for me to remind them of the subject of my study. They then immediately, but politely, ushered me out of their offices, evidently suspecting that I intended to dispute their views with them.) Some sessions were shorter or longer than others simply because of the respondents' terseness or loquaciousness. Others were abbreviated because of time pressures, real or anticipated.

To minimize the likelihood of refusals, I occasionally accepted appointments for considerably less time than the 30 minutes requested in my introductory letters, visits, and calls. I hoped that the respondent's politeness and my ability to interest him in the subject of the interview would allow me to pose all the questions I had planned. In such cases, I found myself trying both to listen to his early responses and to gauge his reaction and the time available to me. From his replies, could I guess if this interview would take longer than expected to complete? Did he seem sufficiently interested in what we were discussing so that I could hope to stretch the time allotted to me? What was the likelihood that we would be interrupted before we had finished? Was I comfortable enough in his presence to be willing to press my questions?

Whenever I sensed that my time was acutely limited or that my reception had been grudging, I was prone to abbreviate my interview schedule. This meant either eliminating some questions altogether or rushing from one question to the next without fully probing each reply. This reaction represented a conscious decision on my part to elicit some reaction from each respondent to all of the topics I wished to investigate, rather than exploring in depth only as many topics as time permitted. In retrospect, this procedure guaranteed that my already small samples would not be much further reduced for purposes of analysis. It also meant, however, that the information I was able to gather was much more superficial than it would have been had I been less ambitious.

Perhaps this problem could have been avoided if I had ordered my questions in order of descending importance, which to some extent I did--first asking a series of general questions covering all forms of protest, and then, after a brief interlude of questions concerning relevant and current legislative issues, returning to the same subjects in more specific form.[16] But I was guided by a desire to avoid a series of disjointed questions and answers in favor of an atmosphere in which both interviewer and respondent participate in a conversation of mutual interest. I arranged my questions in what seemed to me to be a natural progression. But I frequently revised this sequence in order to follow the direction of a respondent's thought, pursuing a subject early in the interview if it followed naturally from his previous response, even if I had originally planned to raise the question only toward the end of our session. This often made it more difficult for me to remember which questions had still to be asked, with the result of occasional lapses and omissions. Still, on balance, I found this strategy more congenial to me, and, I believe, to the Congressmen as well.[17]

During all of the interviews, I was continually aware of the status differences between me and my respondents. Naturally, my malaise tended to diminish with experience, and I discovered, in retrospect, that my earliest interviews were the least satisfactory. With time, I learned the most effective way of phrasing my questions, and at what points it would most likely be necessary for me to probe beneath the surface of their initial replies. But I remained very sensitive to my perception that I was meeting with each Congressman only at his sufferance and that my presence was at least an imposition which he felt obliged to accept, and at most an unwarranted distraction from more pressing activities. This is not to say that most Representatives and Senators were hostile. On the contrary, most (but not all) of my respondents welcomed me cordially and tried to respond thoughtfully.[18] Yet my knowledge of the demands on Members' time, my sensitivity to their staffs' protective officiousness, and the time pressures under which our interviews were conducted always left me with an uncomfortable sense of being a disruptive and probably unwelcome intruder.

My desire, then, to minimize the formality of the interview was undoubtedly as much for my own personal comfort as it was for the demands of my research. I could persuade myself that our interview was a mutually interesting experience in which we were both sharing and from which we were both benefiting. And in fact, the Congressmen also seemed more at ease and more responsive when one question seemed to flow naturally from the last. Several of them noted that the opportunity to "discuss" these subjects was an unexpectedly welcome break from their normal routine. Indeed, at the conclusion of a number of interviews, the respondents expressed curiosity about my opinions on the questions I had asked them.

My status as a student and the association between people "like me" and the dissent and disorder we discussed presented unique advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, many of the more elderly and conservative Members apparently relished the opportunity to lecture a student about the danger of student disruptions and like events. I provided them with a voluntary, captive, and seemingly receptive audience to whom they could vent their anger and frustration. Without any conscious effort on my part, my very presence seemed to stimulate greater emotion and, hopefully, greater thought, than if I had been an older and presumably more moderate scholar. On the other hand, and despite my best efforts to the contrary, some respondents of similar viewpoint assumed from the outset that I would disagree with them and that my questions were deliberately irritating and quarrelsome.[19] To avoid this reaction, I attempted to act and appear in a way which would not suggest a stereotyped image of the student radical. I also tried to convey the impression that I was looking to them for wisdom which I could adopt as my own--that I did not bring into the interview any pre-conceived notions about what answers were "right" and what answers I expected from them.[20]

Thus, many respondents probably were influenced by their perception of me in relation to the questions I was asking. In general, however, my impression is that seeming to be a student--well-informed but inexperienced--can be a marked advantage in this interview setting. Many of the Representatives and Senators who might have been expected to be most reticent and uncooperative believe that their youthful critics simply do not adequately understand and appreciate the wisdom of the Congressional process and the problems they face as Congressmen. As a result, they are probably receptive to students who come to them seeking information, looking upon this as an opportunity to inform and educate. Of course, it is the student's responsibility to inform himself as well as possible beforehand if he expects to receive candid answers to the most penetrating questions. As a general rule, most Members will be agreeable to interviews regarding subjects on which they have some special competence as a result of their Congressional service. That the subject of my research was both controversial and only indirectly related to most topics of Congressional deliberation undoubtedly operated to my disadvantage.

Many discussions of interviewing as a means of generating new data prescribe that the interviewer should remain as neutral as possible. He should try to avoid reacting to his respondents' statements for fear that this might influence them and preclude any claim to comparability among interviews. In practice, I found it both impossible and unproductive to adhere strictly to this prescription. Many of my respondents reacted to questions with strong emotion, and it would have been unnatural for me not to have reacted myself in some way. Further, it undoubtedly would have been insulting and disconcerting to them if their impassioned arguments had been followed by only a stony silence and then by another, possibly unrelated, question. By gestures and expressions more than by words, I attempted to convey understanding and encouragement, but not agreement (although I suppose I was not always successful in projecting this distinction). My impression is that this lapse from strict neutrality is not particularly damaging when interviewing political elites, who are unlikely to be particularly influenced by their impressions of the interviewer's reactions.[21] In fact, I now wonder if I might have been able to elicit more complete responses had I been willing to argue with them. This might have caused them to speak more freely, but it would have demanded more self-assurance than I could muster at that time and, also, it would almost certainly have made them less receptive to future requests for interviews.

The purpose of my interviews was to secure information concerning the respondents' opinions and perceptions. I was interested not merely in what these attitudes were, but also in the reasons, arguments, and assumptions underlying them. For this reason, it was especially important for me to have an accurate record of their responses, anticipating that relatively subtle differences in nuance and word choice might eventually provide clues for explanation and the basis for important analytical distinctions. Whenever possible, therefore, my interviews were tape recorded with the respondents' permission. By carrying a tape recorder in an attache case (with a photographic directory of the Members of Congress for reference), I was able to record the interviews inconspicuously, relying on a microphone placed midway between the respondent and myself.

Tape recording carries with it a variety of dangers, primary among which is the possibility that it might inhibit or otherwise influence the respondents. But my experience suggests that this danger may be negligible when the respondents are Congressmen (or perhaps other elected American public officials as well). Being interviewed is hardly a new experience to such men, and they have learned to respond before radio microphones and television cameras in recording studios, much less before an inconspicuous tape recorder in the privacy of their own offices. If nothing else, this means that Congressmen are unlikely to be inhibited by self-consciousness. Further, most Representatives and Senators have had previous experience in responding to scholarly interviews and will accept assurances of anonymity. (Less than 10% of my respondents refused permission to have our meetings recorded, all of them citing some earlier experience in which their anonymity had been violated. The importance of adhering strictly to whatever pledges of confidentiality have been made cannot be over-emphasized.)

The possibility remains, however, that recording may somehow distort responses no matter who is being interviewed. In my case, the risk was an acceptable one, even given the controversial nature of my subject. If there is a difference between Congressmen's "private" attitudes and "public" postures, it is unlikely that the former could have been elicited in a relatively brief interview with such intensely public men. Also, as I have argued, attitudes and opinions on such a subject are of little interest in themselves, unless there is some reason to believe that they will be reflected, more or less accurately, in behavior. The effect of tape recording, then, probably was to encourage responses consistent with the opinions on which Congressmen would vote and act, permitting me to draw reasonably accurate conclusions about the potential public behavior of Congressmen individually and of the Congress collectively.[22]

If any general conclusion can be drawn about the wisdom of recording interviews, it is that the decision must be contingent upon a number of considerations. Are you seeking factual information or opinions and perceptions? In either case, is it important to have an accurate record of precisely how a respondent replied, or is it sufficient to know only the thrust of his response? Are your respondents likely to have had previous experience being interviewed and recorded? Will the quality of your analysis be enhanced by your ability to quote directly from your interviews? And can you be willing to accept whatever distorting effect recording may have?

Given the alternatives, the potential disadvantages of recording may be outweighed by the deficiencies of the other possible techniques. In the relatively few instances in which I could not record, I found that my hand-written notes were sketchy at best, and misrepresenting at worst. Also, the necessity of writing furiously, raising my head only to ask the next question, created a highly artificial situation and precluded the possibility of establishing any personal rapport with the respondents. Finally, I was then forced to concentrate on writing rather than listening, and it became much more difficult to probe and pursue responses as these interviews developed. In the one instance when I refrained from making any notes until after the interview, I retained so little information that the interview had to be discarded altogether. In most cases, then, recording might at least be tried during a pretest to determine if, as in my experience, the respondents stop paying attention to the microphone as they become engrossed in the subject of the interview.

Tape recording proved to have several advantages for the analysis of the interviews. For financial reasons, I was forced to transcribe them myself. (Each response was entered in a space on mimeographed pages immediately following the relevant question, which facilitated searching through and coding a large number of interviews.) While transcribing, I had an opportunity to listen to the interview once again, noting how it could have been improved, discovering what additional questions might be asked in future interviews, and annotating the transcripts with impressions and interpolations before each interview became mixed in the shuffle of succeeding ones. In addition, it enabled me to return to the recordings themselves whenever a respondent's intended meaning could be clarified by listening again to his inflection and tone of voice.[23] It was also reassuring to know that I had copies of each interview in both recorded and transcribed form, in case either was damaged or destroyed. This guarantee of security is particularly essential when data cannot be re-gathered at acceptable costs of time, effort, and embarrassment.

Having Done It

These advantages of tape recording suggest some final comments on the analysis of the resulting interview data. To reiterate a point made earlier, ambiguous data provide the basis for unambiguous conclusions if too much time elapses between data collection and data analysis. What seemed like a possible interpretation during the interview may later appear to be an obvious implication unless some attempt is made to keep in constant familiarity with the interviews in their raw form. And I have been able to conceive of no better way to insure this sensitivity than by forcing myself to re-read a selection of my interviews periodically. Hopefully, this has encouraged me to re-encounter my own doubts and the deficiencies of the data so that both will be conveyed to whomever may be interested in my conclusions.

The dangers of over-conclusiveness are only increased if the data are to be categorized, coded, tabulated, and analyzed quantitatively. If such techniques are to be applied, ambiguities in the data must be resolved, or at least choices must be made among alternative interpretations. Another inevitable problem concerns the development of categories for coding. A delicate balance must be sought between the categories into which the interview responses seem to cluster most naturally and the categories which promise to be most useful for analysis. For each of the questions discussed in my interviews, I first tried to develop an exhaustive set of plausible alternative responses. However, I soon discovered that many of my obtained responses over-lapped two or more of these categories or fell into unexpected interstices between them. I then attempted to develop only the categories which the responses themselves most clearly suggested, only to find that these categories hindered systematic analysis of some of the most important questions in which I was interested. Eventually, I concluded that there can be no automatic procedure for developing the most appropriate categories and codes. The categories I ultimately adopted emerged from a process of trial and error--for each question, seeking what seemed to be the most acceptable compromise between the requirements of my analysis and the limitations of my data.

This process is essentially a fluid and inter-active one. At no point was I tempted to conclude that I had discovered the only, or even necessarily the best, way of organizing and analyzing my data. As a result, I was able to remain relatively open to new possibilities and perspectives which occurred to me only after the completion of my interviewing. I frequently returned to the data, slicing and re-organizing it in different ways for different purposes, without the sense that I was in any way violating its "natural" form. This advantage satisfied whatever residual uneasiness I still felt about what seemed to be the methodological impurity of my approach. I discovered for myself that the analysis of data, no matter how crude or sophisticated the techniques, is not a mechanical process in which the analyst does little more than organize and collate the data in accordance with prescribed rules and standards of objectivity. Data analysis is certainly as much an art as it is a science--a process of molding and shaping, limited only by the raw materials and the tools available to work them.

The resulting presentation may take a variety of different forms. As a general principle, however, it seems reasonable to expect that the way in which data are treated and presented should be consistent with the manner in which they were gathered. In the case of research based upon interviews, this means that the presentation of conclusions must be superficial or sophisticated in much the same measure as the respondents' replies. Obviously, the analyst should apply his own critical and creative intelligence; otherwise the interview transcripts could simply stand in their raw form. Nonetheless, he must constantly be on the alert for that indefinable point at which insight becomes over-interpretation.

It may be unsatisfying to leave conclusions speculative and questions unanswered. Before research begins, some of these disappointments can be avoided by a realistic attempt to anticipate the depth and completeness of the information which can be gathered, given the questions to be asked and the people of whom they will be asked. If, for example, I had done this as thoughtfully as I should have, I might well have realized that few Members of Congress could be expected to respond profoundly in an interview situation to complex questions of democratic theory which I could not answer to my own satisfaction. This realization might have suggested the value of imposing more structure on my inquiry, assisting my respondents in replying to my questions and assisting me in understanding their replies. After the research is completed, however, one valuable way of re-gaining a sensitivity to the results is to review the process of research itself, a reconstruction such as this has been.[24]

Notes

1. "Research on Congress," P.S.: Newsletter of the American Political Science Association, v. 2, n. 3 (Summer, 1969), pp. 361-365.

2. Ibid., p. 361.

3. Charles O. Jones, "Notes on Interviewing Members of the House of Representatives," Public Opinion Quarterly, v. 23, n. 3 (Fall, 1959), pp. 404-406. The results of Jones' research are reported in Charles O. Jones, "Representation in Congress: The Case of the House Agriculture Committee," American Political Science Review, v. 55 (June, 1961), pp. 358-367.

4. James A. Robinson, "Survey Interviewing Among Members of Congress," Public Opinion Quarterly, v. 23 (1960), pp. 127-138. On the substance of Robinson's research, see James A. Robinson, Congress and Foreign Policy-Making (Homewood, Illinois: The Dorsey Press, 1967).

5. Lewis A. Dexter, "The Good Will of Important People: More on the Jeopardy of the Interview," Public Opinion Quarterly, v. 28, n. 4 (Winter, 1964), p. 557.

6. An interesting exception is the recent research of David Kovenock, reported in his "Communications and Influence in Congressional Decision-Making" and "Influence in the U. S. House of Representatives: Some Preliminary Statistical 'Snapshots'," papers presented respectively at the 1964 and 1967 Annual Meetings of the American Political Science Association.

7. See especially John Wahlke, Heinz Eulau, William Buchanan, and LeRoy Ferguson, The Legislative System (New York, N.Y.: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1962), Roger Davidson, David Kovenock, and Michael O'Leary, Congress in Crisis: Politics and Congressional Reform (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1966), and Roger Davidson, The Role of the Congressman (New York, N.Y.: Western Publishing Company, Inc., 1969).

8. During the formulative stages of this project, I had sought the advice of several scholars experienced in the study of American legislatures. Their reaction was that my research could be done, although I would have difficulty securing the necessary cooperation. It is now obvious that I should have paid more attention to their warnings. But given the commitment which develops during several months of planning and preparation, nothing short of guarantees of failure would have deterred me.

9. This is not meant to minimize the contributions made by the students of role orientations. They have usefully elucidated just what it may mean to be a representative in a complex society, and the range of legitimate and often conflicting behavioral options open to such men and women. For an overview of legislative role studies,

see Malcolm E. Jewell, "A Reappraisal of 'The Legislative System'," a paper presented at the 1970 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association.

10. Of course, the necessity for adaptations in the field can be minimized by careful preparation. But even the best formulated plans may require modification, especially when the site of research is unfamiliar. I am sure that I was able to avoid many difficulties because I had the benefit of prior experience in Washington and the reports of earlier Congressional research experiences.

11. Whenever possible, I gathered this kind of material either from the Congressional Record or from my respondents' assistants. For the reasons I have suggested, however, I have used it sparingly, and then only for clarification of responses rather than as a substitute for them.

12. I was fortunate in that my samples were both random and representative of the universes from which they were drawn. By comparing each sample with its universe along a number of potentially important dimensions--Congressional, constituency, and personal characteristics--I was able to increase my confidence in the probable accuracy of generalizations from my interview data to the total membership of the Congress.

13. This provides me with an opportunity to thank publicly the Congressman and the members of his staff without whose help and support this research would never have been completed: Mattie Barrow, Brenda Carroll, Eugenie Ermoyan, Zoe Gratsias, Joe Lundy, and Doug Norell. A special word is also due to the Congressman's "special assistants" without whose contributions this research would have been completed much sooner--but much less enjoyably.

14. Of special value was the help of Mrs. Judy McFadden with whom I shared my office and my tribulations, and Mr. Richard Beth, my colleague at Yale, and Mr. Ben Barns, both then in the office of Congressman Andrew Jacobs of Indiana, whose friendship and encouragement was more valuable than they could know.

15. Data follow on the time elapsed between my first solicitation and the completion of my interview with each respondent:

Number of weeks:	House		Senate	
	%	(#)	%	(#)
between 0 and 2	67%	(50)	20%	(4)
2 and 4	10%	(8)	35%	(7)
4 and 6	3%	(2)	5%	(1)
6 and 10	12%	(9)	20%	(4)
10 and 15	4%	(3)	15%	(3)
15 and 25	4%	(3)	5%	(1)
Total	100%	(75)	100%	(20)

16. This procedure is similar to that employed in two other studies

of similar questions: Samuel Stouffer, Communism, Conformity and Civil Liberties (New York, N.Y.: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1955), and James W. Prothro and Charles M. Grigg, "Fundamental Principles of Democracy: Bases of Agreement and Disagreement," Journal of Politics, v. 22, n. 2 (May, 1960), pp. 276-294.

17. On occasion, this "conversational" technique created an additional problem. When questions were eliminated because of anticipated time pressures, or when questions were only postponed to follow a respondent's train of thought, it sometimes became very difficult to return to them later with any grace or continuity.

18. Before beginning my interviews, I anticipated that my least successful meetings would be with the oldest and most conservative respondents. This did not prove to be true. I found that many young and liberal Members, whose attitudes I generally shared, were less cordial than their older and more conservative colleagues. This may reflect the greater demands on the time of active liberals, and perhaps also their less personalized style of politics.

19. For example, one of my earliest respondents became exasperated by what he perceived to be a militant posture implicit in my questions. When I asked him why he thought urban riots had occurred, he replied:

> We're going down an alley of discussion I don't even want to pursue. I live close to Berkeley. I know what the situation is in Berkeley, I know who the leaders are of that organization, and I know they want to destroy American government. If this is the kind of interview we're going to have, we might as well draw it to an end.... If you want to go down this line, go talk to ... some of the other boys who agree with that.... You've got me to a point where I don't really care if I talk to you or not. I can see what you're leading to. We have a generation gap here, and we might as well close it right now, really.

Fortunately, I was able to dissuade him by apologetically proclaiming my neutrality and by arguing that I wanted to be able to understand and accurately convey his point of view.

20. I made it a point to dress conversatively and to keep my hair cropped abnormally short. In spite of this disguise, I obviously did bring to the interviews my own preferences and beliefs, however unsatisfying and incoherent. Because I most often agreed with my more liberal or permissive respondents, I was less willing to push them for fuller explanations. Their replies seemed self-evidently correct to both of us, and I was not able to press them as effectively as I could their more conservative colleagues whose opinions seemed more in need of justification.

21. By contrast, consider the comments of Irwin Gertzog, based on his extensive interviews with freshmen Representatives: "Much may depend on the status of the interviewer, the seniority of the Congressman, or both. While most veteran Members might not be 'particularly influenced by their impressions of the interviewer's reactions' when the interviewer is a graduate student, they might be influenced

by such reactions when the interviewer happens to be a member of a prestigious political science faculty. This might be especially true of freshmen Congressmen and/or of Congressmen who are graduates of the school with which the interviewer is affiliated. A good many freshmen with whom I talked seemed extremely anxious to give the 'expected' answer to some of my open-ended questions, much as a student is concerned about providing such an answer on an essay examination. As in the case of the student, these Congressmen were interested in finding out their 'grades,' and apparently they thought they could gauge it from my facial expressions and/or the tone and content of my immediate verbal response. When I failed to give them that kind of satisfaction, they often asked me what I thought about the question I had just asked." (Personal communication, 2 April 1971.)

22. There is always the danger that respondents may simply choose to lie, but the incentive for them to do so can be minimized by providing them with open-ended questions which suggest no correct answer and which allow them to explain and justify their answers as they think necessary.

23. Consider the following statement:

> Well, I certainly wouldn't say that it (dissent) has had too much (effect).

This deceptively simple sentence illustrates a frequent difficulty in interpreting interview transcripts. Depending on the context, it might mean either that it is fortunate that dissent has not been very effective or that dissent has not had effect enough. In this case, the intended meaning soon becomes clear:

> If anything, I suppose I would say that it hasn't had quite enough in arousing us to the problems we face and to the fact that we might do more about it.

But comparable problems with less obvious solutions often complicate the analysis in a study of this kind, making it especially important to have the interviews recorded for future reference.

24. In addition to the articles cited in notes #3-5, other descriptive materials on interviewing in the Congress may be found in appendices of the four following studies: Roger Davidson, The Role of the Congressman (New York, N.Y.: Western Publishing Company, Inc., 1969); Roger Davidson, David Kovenock, and Michael O'Leary, Congress in Crisis: Politics and Congressional Reform (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1966); John Wahlke, Heinz Eulau, William Buchanan, and LeRoy Ferguson, The Legislative System (New York, N.Y.: John Wiley & Sons, 1962); and Donald R. Matthews, U. S. Senators and Their World (New York, N.Y.: Vintage Books, 1960). The present essay also appears as Appendix II in Stanley Bach, "Perceptions of Political Protest: Congressional Reactions to Dissent and Disorder." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Yale University, 1972.