Qualitative Research Protocol
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Acknowledgements

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The study protocol is designed to be used in conjunction with:

- Quantitative Research Protocol
- Gender Politics of Policy Research Protocol
- Life History Research Training Module
- Interview Guide For Gender-Equitable Men
- Interview Guide For Men Who Use Violence
- Ethical and Safety Guidelines for Research on Gender-Based Violence
- report template
Qualitative Life History Research

Purpose of the protocol

This protocol is a guide for conducting life history research with men on masculinities and violence against women that can be used to inform violence prevention policies and programmes. The protocol provides a broad methodological framework for how to plan, implement and disseminate in-depth life history research with two groups of men: those who are known to use violence against their intimate partners and those who are engaged in more gender-equitable activities. The purpose is to better understand men’s pathways and trajectories into violent and non-violent practices and behaviours.

The qualitative research component of the United Nations Multi-Country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific was conducted in five countries (Bangladesh, China, Indonesia (Aceh), Papua New Guinea and Viet Nam) from 2010 to 2013. This protocol outlines the background, objectives and structure of the original study and explains how to replicate this methodology in your setting. The protocol should be used in conjunction with the qualitative tools and the Step by Step guide, part of the Toolkit for Replicating the United Nations Multi-Country Study on Men and Violence. From this document you can develop your own national research protocol.

The following components of the qualitative protocol will need to be adapted to your research context:
- study sites
- questionnaire
- timeline
- budget.

Qualitative research background

As described in the step-by-step guide, the qualitative research is one of three components of the overall UN multi-country study methodology. The qualitative research can be conducted on its own or with the other two components for a more comprehensive picture of the social structures and the underlying norms, attitudes and behaviours related to the use of violence against women.

Interest in men and masculinity in a context of global work on gender equality has been growing over the past quarter century. Recognizing that in any setting there are

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1 In addition to the qualitative research, the quantitative research component was conducted in six countries (Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and Sri Lanka), and the gender politics and policy research component was conducted Cambodia, India, Indonesia and regionally.

2 You can find an overall conceptual framework for all the materials in the introductory section of the step-by-step guide for replicating the UN multi-country study. For more on concepts and terminologies related to violence against women, gender-based violence and masculinities, please
multiple ‘masculinities’, it is important to understand more about those that are counter-hegemonic—that is, those that are not predicated on superiority, control and domination. There is a lack of research in developing country contexts on how men engage in practices that are more gender equitable and may be traditionally seen as ‘women’s practices’ and how men may distance themselves from hegemonic ideals. It is important to examine the heterogeneity of masculinity and to understand the origins of this to understand the specific social, cultural and political conditions in which some men in society reproduce hegemonic masculinity while others produce a caring, collaborative, sharing and responsible masculinity.

**Qualitative research objectives**

The qualitative component of the research aims to look in depth at individual men’s life histories to understand how their experiences shaped their violent or non-violent and gender-equitable practices as well as understanding the trajectory of expression of (counter) hegemonic practices across and throughout men’s lives. To do this, the research contrasts the practices and lives of two groups of men: those who display behaviours that run counter to the mould of traditional or hegemonic masculinity (thus ‘gender-equitable’ men) and men who are identified as using violence against women. By looking at this spectrum, we hope to develop a deeper insight into how we can prevent violence against women and encourage men to be more gender equitable.

**Qualitative research questions**

The qualitative questionnaire guide explores the following research questions:

1. What influences across the life course operate to shape gender-equitable forms of behaviour in men? At what stages across the life course are these expressed and in what ways? What are the relationships between non-traditional practices, the use of violence and attitudes towards and practices of gender equity in other areas of these men’s lives?

2. What influences across the life course operate to shape the violent behaviour of men? At what stages in the life course are different types of violence expressed by men who are violent towards women and in what ways? What are the relationships between the use of violence and attitudes towards and practices of gender equity in other areas of these men’s lives?

3. Are there particular differences in the life histories, trajectories and influences of these two different groups of men and what does this tell us about how to encourage men to be more gender equitable and non-violent?

**Study population**

The study population should be men aged 18 or older.

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reference the Preferred Terminology for the United Nations Multi-Country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific.  
3 See the Preferred Terminology guide for more explanation on ‘perpetrator’ and ‘victim’.
Sample and sampling

The qualitative research uses purposive sampling. At a minimum, it is suggested that you conduct two-part truncated life history interviews with 20 men:

- 10 gender-equitable men who displayed non-dominant/non-traditional notions of masculinity
- 10 men who were known to have perpetrated physical or sexual violence against a female partner; they were identified through social networks, based on certain traits associated with hegemonic masculinity (masculinity based on authority, such as police), or displaying protest masculinity, which arises among people who do not have much authority and resort to hyper-masculine displays as a way of claiming social status, such as militants, gangs, etc.).

While developing your sampling strategy, it is important to remember that individual men who participate in this research project will not fall neatly into one of the two categories; for example, the interviews may reveal that gender-equitable men also have used violence. These are meant to be general guiding characteristics on which to structure the data collection and analysis. Extreme caution needs to be taken to ensure that the qualitative sampling of perpetrators is conducted in an ethical and safe manner. This includes ensuring that the research is conducted by highly qualified qualitative researchers.

The gender equitable men should be purposively sampled to meet the general criteria for the study through social networks, NGO networks and relevant organizations working on men and gender issues in the selected study sites. The men who are violent should be identified through processes of social networking with men who are known in the area to have something that identifies them as hegemonically masculine (having authority in the society, such as police) or displaying protest masculinity, which arises among people who do not have much authority and have to use the hyper masculine displays to claim social status (such as militants, gangs, men who drink heavily in bars, etc.).

NOTE: The aim of qualitative, close-focus research is not to acquire a representative sample but to produce a deeper understanding of a particular situation. Wider implications come not from the diversity of the sample but from the depth of understanding. The aim is to select a situation that can be researched and that, when well understood, provides a platform for thinking about the society. We do not want diversity but variations on the same situation. The sample thus should aim for groups of men or men in the same networks, organizations or communities, provided that they are likely to contain gender dynamics that resonate more widely in the society (not an extremist sect or an isolated village, for instance).

Additional possibilities for post-conflict settings:

- in-depth interviews with male and female survivors of armed conflict-related violence
• in-depth interviews with militia members and combatants, particularly those who have managed to move away from violence
• in-depth interviews with teenage boys about (changing) notions of masculinities in the post-conflict period.

Interviewer training and pilot testing\(^4\)

- Interviewers undergo approximately one week to 10 days of training on violence against women and masculinity generally and life history methodology specifically.
- Training is provided by a local research institute.
- Prior to conducting the research, pilot interviews are conducted with people outside the sample. Each interviewer is required to conduct at least two pilot interviews prior to beginning the field research.\(^5\)

The following is a tentative timeline example for the training:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction of participants and introduction of the study</td>
<td>Introduction to masculinities</td>
<td>Review of life history research methodology</td>
<td>Review life history interview question guide</td>
<td>Practise interviews and report back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction to gender and sex</td>
<td>Introduction to violence against women</td>
<td>Building interview skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Practise interviews and report back</td>
<td>Ethics and safety review and activities</td>
<td>Practise interviews and report back (especially focused on ethics and safety issues)</td>
<td>Pilot interviews</td>
<td>Debrief after pilot interviews and lessons learned and training conclusion</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Finalize interview guides</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Data collection and analysis strategy

- Each selected man is invited to participate in two in-depth interviews of approximately 1–1.5 hours in duration that is audio recorded.
- Generally, the participants are not paid, although they may be given money to cover any expenses incurred to travel to an arranged interview site.
- The interviews are conducted in a language that is appropriate for the participant.
- The interviews are transcribed in the local language and, where possible, analysis is done in the local language.

\(^4\) See the relevant training tools, included within the toolkit, for more details.
\(^5\) See Annex II for tips for qualitative interviews.
• Interviews should be conducted by the selected research institute/researchers, with technical support from violence against women and masculinities technical advisors.

• The data are first examined in the form of life history case studies. This enables attention to the whole story and a consideration of how masculinity changes over time and allows us to deal with intersecting issues of gender, class and ethnicity. Life history case studies also build a picture of social structures and social dynamics and reveal “the collective and the institutional as constructed by practice” (Connell, unpublished, p. 15). This component is time-consuming, and partners should allow adequate time for this type of analysis.

• Following this, group analysis is carried out in which the data is coded thematically, using standard qualitative analysis techniques and analysed using content analysis and analytic induction.

Scope of inquiry

Gender-equitable men
The first of the two interviews explores the participant’s life history, particularly his experiences in childhood and growing up. It will then ask the following broad question: How did you come to be engaged in... [the activist work, non-traditional practices, etc.].? Probing questions are used to explore the trajectory of this practice across his life history, his attitudes towards the work or non-traditional practices, what motivates him, his prior experiences of men doing similar work, the circumstances of his childhood and of gender relations in the home across his life history. The first interview also asks each man to think about himself and people like him and reflect on what he sees as indicating that someone like him is a ‘good’ or ‘valuable’ man. Are these ideas that he sees widely shared in his community? How does violence fit with this; are ‘good’ or ‘valuable’ men those who are willing to use violence? Is the use of violence seen as acceptable to achieve success as a man?

The second interview explores his gender attitudes generally and other gender practices. The interview solicits an account of engagement in (other) aspects of caring, engagement with his children (if any) as a father, the division of labour in the home, his relations with women at home and in his family, his use of violence towards women and children, household decision-making (including economic autonomy of his partner and, if relevant, inheritance in the family) and experiences of men and women in the workplace (if working) and peer group relations among men. Gender attitudes are explored by asking about his views on aspects of gender relations and violence in society. The interviews also explore the participant’s ideas about gender relations and practices of sexual relations with women, in particular women’s sexual availability to men, whether ‘no’ means ‘no’, having sex with women who are drunk and partner concurrency.

Perpetrators of violence
The first interview explores the circumstances of each man’s childhood and of gender relations in the home across his life history. The interview solicits an account of engagement in aspects of caring, engagement with children as a father, the division of
labour in the home, his relations with women at home and in his family, household
decision-making (including economic autonomy of his partner and, if relevant,
inheritance in the family) and experiences of men and women in the workplace (if
working) and peer group relations among men.

The first interview also asks each man to think about himself and people like him and
reflect on what he sees as indicating that someone like him is a ‘good’ or ‘valuable’ man.

The second interview explores each man’s gender attitudes by asking about his views on
aspects of gender relations and violence in society. As with the other interview with
gender-equitable men, this one also explores the participant’s ideas about the range of
attitudes in society on gender relations and ideas about and practices of sexual relations
with women, in particular women’s sexual availability to men, whether ‘no’ means ‘no’,
having sex with women who are drunk and partner concurrency.

The second interview then asks about the details of each man’s intimate relationship
and characteristics of his wife or intimate partner and their relationship. The interview
asks about his perpetration of violence generally and the most recent act of violence in
detail: what happened, when, why, how and what were his feelings around this act of
violence, etc. It also asks about responses of his partner, friends, family and authorities
to his violence.

**Ethical issues**
Potential participants are selected, the study is explained to them and they are asked to
participate. They are told that they are under no obligation to participate, and there will
be no negative consequences if they do not agree. If they agree to participate, they are
then told they may decline any question, withdraw at any stage in the interview process
or withdraw their interviews thereafter. They are given an information sheet and asked
to sign an informed consent form. The consent forms are not linked to the interview
recordings or transcripts and will be kept in a locked filing cabinet.

**POLITICAL SENSITIVITIES OF DATA COLLECTION IN ACEH, INDONESIA**

The qualitative research was included in the UN multi-country study with men in post-conflict
Aceh, Indonesia in 2010–2011. During the course of the life history interviews, men were asked
about their lives during the conflict. They reported sensitive information about their experiences
with the Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM), or Free Aceh Movement, as either a GAM combatant or
non-combatant. The information was highly relevant to how masculinities were constructed in
Aceh and how masculine beliefs, attitudes and practices were linked to experiences of militarized
violence. However, the political sensitivity of the data did become an issue. One respondent
reported highly sensitive information regarding his experiences within the movement. After
deliberation among the research team and with technical advisors, it was decided to remove this
information from the data set because of the potential risk to the respondent (breach of
confidentiality and risk of backlash) and to the research project overall if they reported the
information.
The participants are told that their identities will be kept confidential throughout the processes of data collection as well as in the analysis and write-up of the study findings. Every effort is made to ensure that participants cannot be identified in the final written products of the study.

Adapting the qualitative research component at the national level

Questions to ask in developing country-specific research frameworks:
- What is the research problem? (This will help to formulate and identify a conceptual framework.)
- What are your research objectives?
- What will be your study design?
- What is your study area?
- Who is your study population?
- What will be your study methods?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>2011</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Planning and preparation</td>
<td>Jan</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.1 Conduct literature review</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.2 Develop research questions, determine the study sites and the sample</td>
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<td>1.3 Develop protocol</td>
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<td>1.4 Create national working group</td>
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<td>1.5 National ethics approval if required (national)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Research tools development</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.1 Develop and adapt interview guides</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.2 Translate interview guides (if necessary)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.3 Pre-test interview guides</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Planning and logistics</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.1 Obtain community approval to do research</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.2 Organize equipment, travel, accommodations and logistics</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.1 Select interviewers</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4.2 Develop training materials</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.3 Train interviewers (if necessary)</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Survey implementation</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.1 Select and obtain consent of informants</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.2 Collect data</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.3 Transcribe interviews</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5.4 Translate interviews into English (if necessary)</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 Analysis, reports and dissemination</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1 Analyse data</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.2 Write report</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.3 Organize workshop on the results</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.4 Produce and print country report</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.5 Launch</td>
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</table>
APPENDIX I: Suggested outline for the national study protocol\textsuperscript{6}

The following outlines the order of information you should include in the draft of your national study protocol.

**Title:** As short as possible but covering and indicating the research problem.

**Researchers:** List of researchers, their titles and professional affiliations.

**Background:** Explain why the study should be done. What is already known about the problem through other studies? What is your theoretical or conceptual framework?

**Research objectives:** State the general objectives of the study (the objectives should correspond to the study design and methodology).

**Research questions:** Specify each of the research questions.

**Study area:** Specify the geographical area for the study. What is known about the social, economic and epidemiological contexts?

**Study design:** Will the design involve in-depth interviews, focus groups or a combination of them?

**Study population:** Who constitutes the study population (ages, sex and other characteristics)?

**Sampling design and procedures:** What is the sample size and the rationale for the sample size calculation? What are the eligibility requirements for participants? How will respondents be located, recruited and selected?

**Study methods:** Describe in detail the methods to be used. Attach any research instruments to be used.

**Data management and analysis plan:** How will data be processed and analysed?

**Organization of fieldwork:** All the steps in the fieldwork should be described: what will be done, when, how and by whom.

**Ethical consideration:** Ethical issues should be specified and assessed by the researchers and by an ethics review committee.

**Timetable:** When will stages, such as preparations, pre-testing, data collection, analysis, writing and reporting, take place?

**Budget:** Costs should be specified and correspond to the time plan and the general description in a realistic way.

**References:** Reference all materials used to develop the research protocol (including all literature that was reviewed).

**Appendices:** This typically includes the research instrument or CV of the researchers.

\textsuperscript{6} Based on the outline included in Ellsberg and Heise, 2005, p. 59.
APPENDIX II: Tips for qualitative interviews

1. An interview is not a dialogue. The whole point of the interview is to prompt the respondent to tell his or her story. Limit your own remarks to a few pleasantries to break the ice, then brief questions to guide the respondent along. It is not necessary to give him or her details of your own experience in a certain situation to prompt the respondent to tell you about his or her experience in a similar setting.

2. Ask questions that require more of an answer than ‘yes’ or ‘no’. Start with why, how, where or what kind of ... to encourage the respondent to elaborate.

3. Ask one question at a time. Sometimes interviewers ask a series of questions all at once. Most likely, the respondent will answer only the first or last question. You will catch this kind of questioning when you listen through the tape after the session, and you can avoid it the next time.

4. Ask brief questions. We all know some interviewers become almost speech makers, taking five minutes to ask a question. It is unlikely that the respondent is so dull that it takes more than a sentence or two for him or her to understand the question.

5. Start with questions that are not controversial; save the delicate questions, if there are any, until you have become better acquainted. A good place to begin is with the respondent’s youth and background.

6. Don’t let periods of silence fluster you. Give your respondent a chance to think of what he or she wants to add before you hustle him or her along with the next question. Relax, write a few words on your notepad. The sure sign of a beginner interviewer is a question asked whenever a brief pause occurs.

7. Don’t worry if your questions are not as beautifully phrased as you would like them to be. A few fumbled questions likely will help put your respondent at ease. It is not necessary to practise fumbling a few questions, however; most of us are nervous enough to do that naturally.

8. Don’t interrupt a good story because you have thought of a question or because your respondent is straying from the planned outline. If the information is pertinent, let him or her go on with it, but jot down your questions on your notepad so you will remember to ask them later.

9. If your respondent does stray into subjects that are not pertinent (such as digressions about a family member’s children or family medical problems); try to pull him or her back to the topic as quickly as possible. For example: ‘Before we move on, I’d like to find out how the closing down of liquor shops in 1985 affected your family’s finances. Do you remember that?’
10. It is often hard for a respondent to describe specific people. An easy way to begin is to ask him or her to describe the person's appearance. From there, the respondent is more likely to move into the character description.

11. Try to establish at every important point in the story where the respondent was or what his or her role was in the event in order to indicate how much of it is eye-witness information and how much is based on the reports of others. For example: 'Where were you at the time of the mine disaster?' 'Did you talk to any of the survivors later?' Work around these questions carefully so that you will not appear to be doubting the accuracy of the narrator's account.

12. Do not challenge accounts you think might be inaccurate. Instead, try to develop as much information as possible that can be used by researchers later on in establishing what probably happened. Your respondent may be telling you quite accurately what he or she saw. As Walter Lord explained when describing his interviews with survivors of the Titanic, "Every lady I interviewed had left the sinking ship in the last lifeboat. As I later found out from studying the placement of the lifeboats, no group of lifeboats was in view of another and each lady probably was in the last lifeboat she could see leaving the ship."

13. Tactfully point out to the respondent that there is a different account of what he or she is describing, if there is. Start out by saying, 'I have heard...' or 'I have read...'. This is not to challenge his or her account but rather provide an opportunity for the respondent to bring up further evidence to refute the opposing view or to explain how that view was established or to temper what he or she already said. If done skilfully, some of your best information can come from this juxtaposition of differing accounts.

14. Try to avoid 'off the record' information—the times when the respondent asks you to turn off the recorder while he or she tells you a good story. Ask the respondent to let you record the whole thing and promise that you will erase that portion if he or she asks you to after further consideration. You may have to erase it later, or he or she may not tell you the story at all, but once you allow 'off the record' stories, the respondent may continue with more and more off-the-record requests, and you will end up with almost no recorded interview at all. 'Off the record' information is only useful if you are researching a subject and this is the only way you can get the information. It has no value if your purpose is to collect information for later use by other researchers.

15. Don’t switch the recorder off and on. It is much better to waste a little tape on irrelevant material than to call attention to the tape recorder by a constant on/off operation. For this reason, we do not recommend the stop/start switches available on some microphones. If your microphone has such a switch, tape it to the 'on' position—then forget about it. Of course you can turn off the recorder if the telephone rings or if someone interrupts your session.

16. To maintain confidentiality when discussing sensitive issues like violence, interviews must take place between the respondent and the interviewer—and no one else. The general rule of violence against women research is that a child up to the age of 2 years can be present, if absolutely necessary. Ensure the privacy of the room or setting as well. Just because a room has walls, doesn’t mean those walls are soundproof.
17. End the interview at a reasonable time. An hour and a half to two hours is probably the maximum. First, you must protect your respondent against over-fatigue; second, you will be tired even if he or she isn’t. Some respondents will tell you frankly if they are tired or their spouse will. Otherwise, you must plead fatigue, another appointment or no more tape.

18. Don’t use the interview to show off your knowledge, vocabulary, charm or other abilities. Good interviewers do not shine; only their interviews do.

REFERENCES


