

Researching One's Own Field. Interaction Dynamics and Methodological Challenges in the Context of Higher Education Research

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Abstract: In contrast to quantitative approaches, where interaction effects are usually regarded as errors or disruption, we understand interviews as social situations and the interaction dynamics between interviewee and interviewer as constitutive for data collection and interpretation.

We conducted interviews with various actors from the academic field for a research project in higher education research. Based on our field experience we assume that interviews also offer opportunities for the respondents to present themselves in a discursive process.

In this article we first show that many of our interviewees perceived us as evaluators. We argue that the interviewees' self-presentations and rhetorical strategies were shaped by the evaluative and competitive environment in which they took place, i.e. that of the entrepreneurial university. Furthermore we sum up various types of interactive effects which can occur when researchers interview actors with a higher status in the academic field. These research up-effects as well as the interviewees' perception of us as evaluators influenced both how and what they told us as well as what they kept silent. Therefore we plead that researchers should look out more carefully for interaction dynamics when interpreting data, as they also might be pointers to tensions, conflicts or opposing perspectives.

Table of Contents

- [1. Introduction](#)
- [2. Some Methodical Remarks on Field Experiences and Steps of Analysis](#)
- [3. The Interaction Partners](#)
 - [3.1 The position of the researchers](#)
 - [3.2 Positioning the experts](#)
- [4. Interaction Dynamics](#)
 - [4.1 The interviewees perceived as evaluators](#)
 - [4.2 Interaction dynamics in research-up settings](#)
- [5. Summary and Short Prospect](#)

[References](#)

[Authors](#)

[Citation](#)

1. Introduction

The present restructuring of the higher education system based on the Bologna Process has as its corollary the reshaping of the universities as "entrepreneurial universities" (CLARK, 1998) and goes hand in hand with an increasing prevalence of neo-liberal concepts within organizations of academic research, teaching and administration (MÜNCH, 2009, 2011).¹ It is also transforming the way academic knowledge is produced and imparted. The research project "Nach Bologna. Gender Studies in der unternehmerischen Hochschule" [After Bologna: Gender Studies in Entrepreneurial Universities]² examines these changes with a focus on the intellectual and institutional practices involved in installing gender studies curricula in German-speaking countries.³ [1]

Since the time of Max SCHELER (1960 [1924]) and Karl MANNHEIM (1982 [1931]) there has been consensus within sociology and history of science that science must be understood as a practice which has institutional as well as social and intellectual dimensions. The latter are posited as closely interrelated factors, which alternately configure one another (cf. overviews in FELT, NOWOTNY & TASCHWER, 1995; HARK, 2005; MAASEN, 1999; WEINGART, 2003). In our project we look at the social structure of the academic world, shaped as it is by relations of recognition, and focus on phenomena which become notable when science is understood as a field of struggles. Dynamics within higher education politics or academia's "asymmetric gender culture" [*asymmetrische Geschlechterkultur*] (MÜLLER, 2000) would be examples of such phenomena, along with external dynamics, in particular shifts in the relationship between state and universities or in the state-marketplace-university triad. [2]

If until 1996 it was the number of newly established Chairs in women's studies which indicated the degree to which women's and gender studies became institutionalized, then from 1997 onward, it was replaced by the number of newly established curricula in gender studies. In the respective universities, this implementation often took place alongside the implementation of the Bologna reforms. Proponents of gender studies may have used the reform as a *structure of opportunity* to improve their discipline's precarious and somewhat contested position within these universities. On the other hand it must be assumed that the discipline of gender studies is by and large still committed to the objectives of social and epistemological criticism which were part of its genesis in the 1970s. Therefore, many in gender studies see the economic rationale underlying the

1 The present article has already been published, in a somewhat different and shorter version (MALLI & SACKL, 2013).

2 The project is supported by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) and the German Research Foundation (DFG) within the framework of the D-A-CH-Program "Entrepreneurial Universities and Gender Change: Arbeit – Wissen – Organisation" (<http://genderchange-academia.eu/> [Accessed: July 28, 2014]).

3 This research project is conducted jointly between the Center for Interdisciplinary Women's and Gender Studies, Technische Universität Berlin (Sabine HARK) and the Chair for Sociology of Gender Relations at Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz (Angelika WETTERER). The Berlin team researches curricula in Germany, the Graz team examines curricula in Austria and Switzerland. The present article's empirical base consists of interviews conducted with experts in Austria and Switzerland.

restructuring of the universities very critically. This makes the discipline of gender studies stand out as an excellent field for research concerning the implementation of the Bologna reforms. We argue that in the implementation process, gender studies' particular academic objectives were fused with Bologna imperatives, thereby creating local "institutional hybrids" [*institutionelle Hybride*] (MÜNCH, 2009, 2011). [3]

In a first phase of our project we focused on the institutional dimension in the establishment of gender studies curricula. We conducted interviews with, all in all, 28 experts. Our sample consisted of two main groups of actors involved in the implementation of the degree programs: On the one hand we interviewed academics (professors of gender studies, assistants, lecturers) and non-academic staff who initiated the programs and who are in charge of the content, organization and coordination of the programs. On the other hand we talked to members of the university management and faculties, e.g. rectors, vice rectors, deans and members of the university council. We tried to gather several perspectives from different groups of actors to receive a differentiated view on the process of establishing the gender studies curricula. [4]

Besides other questions, we asked the interviewed experts about the different phases of the implementation as well as about the negotiation processes involved, about the motivation for establishing the degree program, about its objectives, the allocation of financial and staff resources, how the curriculum was worked out, and, lastly, about the involved actors. [5]

In the present article we would like to address specific methodological challenges posed by expert interviews as complex interactions. We first give some methodical remarks on our experiences within the field and the way we analyzed our empirical data (Section 2). Secondly, we would like to look more closely at the positions and roles of the partners in the interactions (Section 3): those of the researchers themselves (Section 3.1) as well as those of the experts (Section 3.2). In Section 4, we discuss several interaction dynamics which occurred during our field work: On the one hand, there were several indicators that our interviewees perceived us as evaluators (Section 4.1). On the other hand, we will address different effects in the interview settings which may appear when researchers interview actors with a higher status in the academic field (Section 4.2). In Section 5, we will sum up our most important findings and give a short prospect. [6]

2. Some Methodical Remarks on Field Experiences and Steps of Analysis

Our understanding of expert interviews' methodology is grounded in the insight that research data is not obtained in a neutral interview situation. We see the experts' statements rather as interaction variables, meaning that interaction effects should not to be dismissed as confounding variables but have to be understood as constitutive for the process of data collection and analysis (BOGNER & MENZ, 2009, p.90). [7]

Indeed, theoretically aware of the fact that interview situations almost always have to be reflected as social situations, we mainly experienced the social dimension of interview settings while doing our fieldwork. We designed our interview guide based on the concept of Alexander BOGNER and Wolfgang MENZ, who propose, as we already argued, to understand the collected data as "variables of interaction" (p.61; our translation). To a certain extent, the interview can be prepared strategically by positioning the interviewers, e.g. as co-experts, accomplices or critics, that is to say, in ways that the interviewees feel to be invited or authorized to express these parts of their interpretative knowledge which otherwise would not pass the normative screen of the ideal of neutrality (TRINCZEK, 1995). For designing our interview guide in a rather unorthodox way we furthermore used the "discursive interview" [*diskursive Interview*] developed by Carsten B. ULLRICH (1999). This method works explicitly with provocative questions to gain patterns of interpretation which seem to be so self-evident to the interviewees that they would not articulate them without provocation. [8]

While doing fieldwork we successively noticed that not only our intentional positioning as interviewers influenced the interview situation but also the interviewees' expectations of both our research project's aim and us as interviewers. As we will show below many of our interviewees perceived us, for example, as evaluators, and following this, they understood our research project as evaluation of the gender studies curricula. Based on this experience we increasingly became aware of the impact of the perception of interviewers and their competences by the interviewees. [9]

Although the primary aim of the project "After Bologna" is to reconstruct the process of implementation of gender studies curricula, this *side product* of fieldwork made us curious and we intended to learn more about those interaction effects by conducting a thematically focused re-analysis of our empirical material, which consists of 28 verbatim transcribed interviews and our field notes including compact descriptions of the interview situation and the experts' behavior. [10]

The analysis demonstrated that our impressions about the interviewees' perception of us as evaluators were evident within the empirical data: in nearly every interview we could identify indications that the interviewees spoke to us as if we were evaluating the gender studies curricula. [11]

After selecting the relevant interview-excerpts and important parts of our field notes, we analyzed these data in detail to classify different (rhetorical) strategies used by our interviewees. As the results show, we could reconstruct four different indications for perceiving us as evaluators, which are described in detail in Section 4.1: 1. members of the university management are interested in our expertise as the basis for decision-making; 2. gender studies-actors themselves would like to use our findings to support their own interests and aims; 3. gender studies-actors are describing the gender studies curricula in exclusively positive terms; 4. members of the university management emphasize that gender studies are part of an increasingly competitive academic environment. [12]

Furthermore we re-analyzed the interviews and field notes to find types of interactive situations which might be characteristic when conducting research within one's own field; especially when the interaction dynamics occur in research-up settings. We therefore followed the method of qualitative content analysis as adopted by Michael MEUSER and Ulrike NAGEL (2002) as well as Jochen GLÄSER and Grit LAUDEL (2004) especially for expert interviews. [13]

By combining an exploration of the data by progressive stages with a theory-based system of categories we found out three types of effects in our interview settings, which are described in detail in Section 4.2: 1. the authority effect; 2. the iceberg effect, and 3. the paternalism effect. [14]

But before we deal with the various types of interactive situations we will stress the social positions and roles of the partners in the interaction. Firstly, we address ourselves as research subjects in terms of Pierre BOURDIEU's concept of the academic field (e.g. 1992 [1984]). Secondly, we define our interviewees as experts under the theoretical focus of the sociology of knowledge. By following BOGNER and MENZ (2009) we understand the interviewees' knowledge not only as neutral information but also as influenced by their interests, i.e. their knowledge includes a subjective dimension. We argue that both the positions of the researchers and the positions of the interviewees have an effect on the interview situation. That is why we will discuss these positions in the following section. [15]

3. The Interaction Partners

3.1 The position of the researchers

Research in the academic field, of which we as academic researchers are a part, presents the danger of *blind spots* because of the close proximity between the researchers and the object of the research. The baggage of academic knowledge shared by researchers and researched, which in our case is the result of having been socialized in the same academic field, may result in a tacit agreement of what can and what cannot be taken for granted. The habitus, defined by Pierre BOURDIEU as a system of "durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures" (1990, p.53), generates practices and views grounded in the schemes of perception, thought and action (BOURDIEU, 1993a [1980]) of the field, resulting in a similarity between the practices and opinions of different actors: they become *homologous* (BOURDIEU, 1992 [1984]). Because of such tacit agreements on the legitimacy of scientific and scholarly models in a given academic field, it is possible to ask many questions and say a lot, except concerning that which is taken for granted. For our survey it was therefore particularly important to reflect prior to the interviews about possible shared assumptions.⁴ [16]

4 BOURDIEU (1997 [1993], p.785) describes such a situation of "perfect agreement" between interviewer and respondent, in which the interviewer—an actress—omits to mention a whole set of underlying assumptions, because she is interviewing an actor. As a result, the interview was considered a failure and was not included in the published version of "The Weight of the World" (BOURDIEU et al., 1999 [1993]). This book portrays people from different social status by

In order to deal with the problem of proximity to and distance from our object of research, we will make use of BOURDIEU's concept of "scientific reflexivity" [*wissenschaftliche Reflexivität*] (1993b) in an attempt to "objectify the objectifying subject" (BOURDIEU, 1992 [1984], p.10; our translation), which means to consider ourselves as research subjects. According to our academic training in sociology, cultural anthropology and musicology and our field of research in those areas we would define our own position in the intersection of the social sciences and cultural studies. Although we actually deal with the field of gender studies, we were considered by our interviewees as sociologists of knowledge, respectively researchers of higher education, rather than as members of the gender studies-community, which means they noticed us as distant observers of the scene. Yet another gap between our interviewees and us is based on the academic status. Because of our stage within the academic career, we would position ourselves as young post-doc-academics who do not yet have the same intellectual prominence or academic power at our disposal as our interviewees. [17]

Defining one's own position in the academic field in this way helps neutralize a certain probability of error arising from the scientists' status as observing subjects. We see it as necessary to include in such reflections not only the biographical particulars and social characteristics of the researchers, but more importantly the distortions which are evident in the collective history of a discipline and inherent in its legitimate scientific and scholarly explanations, in order to become aware of bias inscribed into its theories, problems and categories (BOURDIEU, 1993b, p.366). BOURDIEU mentions in this context that scientific and scholarly reflection must necessarily involve collective self-analysis. In her remarks on a "clinical sociology of women's and gender studies" [*klinische Soziologie der Frauen- und Geschlechterforschung*], Sabine HARK (2007) makes a case for performing such self-analysis within the discipline. This could mean, for example, to reflect critically on the presuppositions underlying the discipline's theoretical and methodological resources, as well as asking where gender studies are situated within the academic field, or even to raise questions about conflicts and struggles within that field. We are convinced that looking deeply into the history, the theory and the methodology of feminism and women's and gender studies as well as into the latter's history of becoming an institution constitutes a necessary first step towards a clinical sociology of women's and gender studies. Such self-analysis would not only point out conflicts internal to the discipline but also highlight struggles with actors from the wider academic field. [18]

In the context of our project we especially focus on conflicts and struggles within the field of gender studies. According to HARK's suggestion we also consider the historical conditions which have influenced the process of institutionalization of gender studies within the academic field over the last 30 years. [19]

compact descriptions of their everyday lives and daily suffering. One of the characteristics of this survey—conducted by BOURDIEU and a team of 22 researchers—is that it presents the transcription of nearly the whole interviews, so that the interviewed people and their voices come to the fore while the researchers and their academic speech take a back seat.

In the following section we are looking at the other participants in such interactions: Who are the actors, or groups of actors, involved in the process of implementing gender studies? What are their explicit and/or implicit objectives and interests? And which resources, material, social or symbolic, do they have at their disposal to reach their aims? [20]

3.2 Positioning the experts

Following MEUSER and NAGEL (2002), we understand experts as actors who have privileged access to information about the process of implementing gender studies curricula because they have been (or are) involved in that process in a responsible capacity. Starting from the assumption that there is not necessarily a direct correlation between an actor's formal position and the real influence of his/her knowledge, we include in that category actors who are not formally in charge of establishing the curriculum at their universities, but who have nevertheless profound knowledge on the subject; this includes actors who actively opposed the curriculum (BOGNER & MENZ, 2009). When selecting the experts to be interviewed, we made sure to include different status groups: academics who were directly involved, directors of degree programs, program coordinators as well as actors from the university management and the faculty. So our survey is designed in particular to include the perspectives of different actors from different status groups, who were involved to different degrees in the implementation of the gender studies curricula. This enables us to present as many relevant perspectives on the field of gender studies as possible. Contrasting such different perspectives makes it possible to identify modes of social interpretation (ULLRICH, 1999). Lines of conflict become visible precisely because these actors have different or even opposing perspectives, interpretations and views. These lines of conflict in turn allow us to identify the position of gender studies within the respective universities and shed some light on conflicts within the academic field. [21]

In the context of our interview analysis we especially differentiate between the perceptions of gender studies-actors and the perceptions of managerial staff—rectors, vice rectors, deans and members of the university council. The group of gender studies-actors includes lecturers of gender studies curricula, administrative staff organizing and coordinating the gender studies curricula as well as ascending academics. Furthermore, we interviewed university professors of gender studies who are internationally accepted as prominent intellectuals and hold powerful positions within their own universities. Moreover they are engaged in several political contexts within and outside the academic field. Some of the interviewed actors have already been involved in establishing women's and gender studies in the 1970s and 1980s at their universities and can be seen as initiators of the gender studies curricula. Summed up, the interviewed gender studies-actors appear as a *pressure group* to strengthen the institutional level of gender studies within their universities. [22]

Following BOGNER and MENZ (2009), we differentiate between three fundamental dimensions of expert knowledge: technical knowledge, process

knowledge and interpretative knowledge. The term *technical knowledge* characterizes that area of knowledge which is constituted by the routines of application or bureaucratic competences. *Process knowledge* refers to information about routines of interaction, procedures or organizational constellations in which the experts are directly involved—it is the practical know-how generated within one's own context of action. *Interpretative knowledge* in turn applies to the subjective relevance, the rules, perspectives and interpretations of the experts. By reconstructing this area of knowledge we enter the field of ideas and ideologies, concepts of sense and patterns of explanation. This interpretative dimension of knowledge proved particularly useful when reconstructing the developmental dynamics of the implementation process and in order to show that experts hold their positions not only formally but are trying to assert themselves and argue their points. Accordingly, we understand the actors' knowledge not only as information relevant to our subject, but rather as influenced by their interests which in turn are determined by the experts' social positions within the academic field. From this point of view, comments free from normative attitudes hardly occur. Especially these subjective dimensions of the experts' knowledge showed us the way to the effects of interaction within the conducted interviews, which will be presented in the next section. [23]

4. Interaction Dynamics

4.1 The interviewers perceived as evaluators

Understood as social situations, research interviews allow interviewees to present themselves in a discursive process. We argue that the interviewed actors' self-presentations and rhetorical strategies are shaped by the evaluative and competitive environment of the entrepreneurial university, where the position of gender studies is still contested.⁵ In the new system of "total control" [*totale Kontrolle*] (MÜNCH, 2011) evaluation has become an instrument of micro-politics and is believed to make performance transparent; it thus plays a decisive role in the allocation of financial resources. This function of evaluation becomes particularly critical in a situation of an increased struggle for resources. Furthermore, the practice of evaluation itself indicates a change within the culture of academia and shows that the old social contract for the sciences has been terminated: trust in the sciences' ability to self-regulate is replaced with increasing control (e.g. MAASEN & WEINGART, 2008; MÜNCH, 2011). [24]

Certain statements by the interviewed experts made it evident to us that they perceived us as evaluators. BOGNER and MENZ (2009) created a typology of how interviewers were perceived by interviewed experts. They characterize one

5 Marylin STRATHERN (2000, p.287) has shown that evaluation as a controlling and monitoring instrument is aimed at fostering the self-indoctrination of actors within academia according to the exigencies of the market economy and, consequently, fundamentally affects these actors' self-images. They no longer trust their own experience and impressions, but are instead reliant on the results of—seemingly—objective evaluations. However, finding out to what extent the results of the new controlling mechanisms and instruments of government—permanent visibility and performance control—have a decisive influence on the subjectivity of our interviewees would necessitate further research.

of these interaction constellations as *the interviewer as an evaluator*. It goes without saying that such a constellation never occurs in a pure form, but instead must be understood as a type, i.e. as condensation from extreme cases. Similarly, we only found individual elements of this type in our interviews; none of them was entirely characterized by the attributes of this constellation. [25]

It was predominantly members of the university management and gender studies-actors directly in charge of the degree program who perceived us as evaluators. In this connection, we could classify four different (rhetorical) strategies used by our interviewees. [26]

First strategy: As first strategy, we could identify that experts from the management level in particular expressed interest in our expertise and in the results of our study. But their interest was expressed in combination with an explicit request: they wanted to use our results as the basis for decisions concerning the curriculum's future. "Yes, yes. Of course I would like to make use of the wealth of your knowledge at some point" (I1⁶).⁷ The interviewed expert hoped to use the results of our study as the basis for decision-making concerning the degree program's restructuring and/or its formal repositioning within the university. It was evident throughout this particular conversation that we were offered a deal, consisting in a fair exchange of information: If the interviewee agreed to answer our questions, he expected some information from us in return, which he was going to use as soon as possible. The interviewee quoted before actually articulated this request even more forcefully when he realized that our study would not be finished before 2014, two years after our interview: "But I am sure that you have set yourselves some milestones, that you've said to yourselves, at that point in time I need to have (knocks on the table) this, this and this" (I1). [27]

Second strategy: Similarly, several interviewed actors who were directly involved in implementing the curricula expressed the hope that our findings could be used to support their interests, such as preserving the curriculum and improving its surrounding conditions. But they also cautiously pointed out that our results might put the curriculum's future in danger:

"Well, we'd better not spread that around too much, because then they'll close it down/ So that is basically [...] the dilemma. One has to be kind of [...] has to be cautious as well. [...] One has to be careful with what is being discussed internally, and whether these things stay internal. Because if not, we're only handing those constant critics of the curriculum some useful arguments, so they can shut it down" (I2). [28]

We sum up these results as the second indication for perceiving us as evaluators. Strictly speaking, these experts did not perceive us as evaluators in the sense that they saw us as representatives of a superior authority, charged

6 I1 = Interviewee 1

7 The interviews were conducted in German.

with assessing the curriculum's efficiency. What did, however, become very clear was that they perceived us as a potential risk, as we might pass on information to the "wrong" people and in this way endanger the future of the curriculum. By discussing this problem openly with us, the interviewees in fact turned us, in a manner of speaking, into their accomplices. We interpret this as a strategy of coping with the doubts they had about us and whether we could be trusted to keep the disclosed information confidential. In fact, several of the gender studies-actors explicitly asked to remain anonymous or even requested to authorize the transcribed interview. [29]

Third strategy: Perhaps the most significant piece of evidence supporting our thesis (that the experts perceived us as evaluators) is the fact that they generally described the curriculum to us in remarkably positive terms:

"I mean, I now have 45/ in the lecture 45 PEOPLE. For the seminar I got 35 registrations, where the maximum would normally be just 30. We probably will have to, we've almost come to the point where we'll have to offer a parallel seminar [...]. So that's quite a success story [...]. We have a great community here. Students form networks, they have so much energy, it is definitely amazing. So all in all a very beautiful success story" (I3). [30]

This particular rhetorical strategy—providing numbers as evidence to show that a degree program in women's/gender studies is in fact working efficiently—can be understood as part of a wider context of strategies to ensure the curriculum's survival within the evaluative environment of the university; such strategies are most likely derived from previous experience with evaluations. [31]

BOGNER and MENZ (2009) point out that this underlying expectation—that the interviewees are in fact evaluators—occurs most often in fields of action where political pressure is acutely felt, because proof of an institution's success or efficiency is still lacking. As HARK (2005, p.379) has shown in her history of feminist discourse, the attempt to institutionalize women's and gender studies has so far been only partially successful. However, on many occasions in the past few years resources were successfully used and spaces appropriated. This has enhanced the discipline's visibility in the higher education sector and made it possible, to some extent, to perpetuate and consolidate it as a field of academic research and teaching. At the same time, gender studies have come under more and more pressure due to the increasing marketization within the university sector. This means the institutionalization process in women's and gender studies is (still) taking place in conditions that are precarious and highly *sensitive to changes* (ibid.). [32]

Fourth strategy: In many conversations with experts from the university management level, the latter made it clear that the process of establishing gender studies curricula was definitely still ongoing. Moreover, they emphasized that the programs' future was uncertain, not in the sense that they had no future at all, but in the sense that their existence as institutions in their present form could not be guaranteed (a form that is to some extent dependent on material conditions and

in turn contributes to their creation): "I believe they will offer gender studies in the future, that will continue. But how the whole thing will be structured, and where the emphasis will be, that [remains] for us to see" (I1). [33]

Another interviewee emphasized that gender studies were part of an increasingly competitive academic environment. Her line of argument suggests that gender studies have so far been at an advantage compared to other disciplines, because their programs received special funding:

"And the only result of that is [is] that gender studies, let me just put it this way and I'm not being mean here, have so far operated in a sheltered environment, because they were basically on the safe side, in terms of funding. [...] They didn't have to apply for it, et cetera. In the future they will have to apply for funding, just like everybody else. [...] and the interesting thing about that is, at that precise moment they become part of the competitive academic environment. [...] *Then* they'll have to face the competition. And not all of their programs will automatically get funded, there will be evaluations, et cetera, et cetera, to make sure it's all academically sound and only then they will get funding" (I4). [34]

This quote is a prime example for the neo-liberal rhetoric inherent in the argumentation of persons mostly from university management level, demonstrating once more that there is an increased struggle for resources within the academic field. [35]

4.2 Interaction dynamics in research-up settings

When researching marginalized groups, researchers have to address issues of "researching down." In the sociology of elites and in management research, however, academics are facing the opposite challenge of "research on equal terms" or "researching up." Bernd WARNEKEN and Andreas WITTEL (1997, pp.1-2) deal with the challenges in business research arising from the interviewees' higher social status. They declare that in this field, researchers find themselves confronted with certain aspects of self-assertion—a problem that boils down to an underlying "fear of not being recognised" (p.1; our translation) as a scientist. Similar forms of relationships between researchers and researched are also to be found in higher education research.⁸ Such issues are responsible for involuntary distancing that might occur between researchers and researched, in spite of their apparent proximity as actors from the same academic field. [36]

Starting from an understanding of the interview as an interactive setting, we will subsequently address three interaction effects which occurred during our field work with actors in—compared to us—higher status' positions within the academic field. In our case, such interviewees were members of the university

8 Gert DRESSEL and Nikola LANGREITER (2003) also address the asymmetric relations between researchers and researched within higher education research. They attempted to formulate a "cultural science of cultural studies" [*Kulturwissenschaft der Kulturwissenschaften*] aimed at applying a scientific method to their own academic field.

management and university professors. In the following, we will discuss these effects based on concrete examples. [37]

1. When conducting research within one's own academic field it may happen that an interviewer has some difficulty maintaining his/her academic authority against that of an interviewee or, in other words, s/he is struggling for recognition as a scientist or scholar. That is what we would like to discuss as *authority effect*. In one interview situation we had to hold our ground for 20 minutes, explaining our academic background as well as giving a summary of our previous research. Only after that we could start the interview. This preliminary talk was similar to an exam situation, in that we were asked questions about the theoretical foundations of our research as well as about our empirical approach. The actual subject of our previous research, however, had no or only limited relevance to the subject of the interview.⁹ [38]

We also found that, during an interview, respondents sometimes tried to assess the interviewer's general knowledge about the field. This occurred for example when interviewees were casually mentioning theories, facts or names one ought to be familiar with; or when they were asking specific questions. It goes without saying that interviewers had better have good answers to these questions in order to maintain their status as an *authority on facts*. Such strategies can also be interpreted as attempts to find out if there were particular interests behind our survey, whether we were acting as evaluators, and, ultimately, if it was safe to share sensitive information with us. [39]

2. In cases where respondents express themselves in a manner that can be described as "wordy but imprecise" or "weary and tight-lipped," the situation changes from an "interview into an audience" (WARNEKEN & WITTEL, 1997, p.7; our translation). Berthold VOGEL (1995, p.79) used the term "iceberg effect" [*Eisbergeffekt*] for such an attitude characterized by cool and indifferent replies; it aptly sums up one expert's behavior during the interview. The effect was manifest not only on the level of speech, but also in the expert's behavior. Not only did the interviewee reply in a very elliptical manner, she was even pacing the room while we were asking our questions. She then asked us to repeat the questions, not having properly understood them the first time. [40]

3. Besides this interview there was another one which confronted us with an extreme form of the so called "paternalism effect" [*Paternalismuseffekt*]. Referring to VOGEL (1995, p.80) it is characterized by a respondent who appears conspicuously benevolent towards the interviewers, but manages to take over the conversation all the same. As a consequence, it becomes impossible to ask one's own questions; the interviewee dictates what is being talked about. In our case, the interviewee explained to us at length his own views on Bologna and the

9 BOURDIEU (1997 [1993], p.784) already pointed out that interviews might turn into a "socioanalysis as a pair," "which concerns and tests the researcher as well as the person he is interviewing" in such cases where the relationship between researchers and researched is characterized by similar social affiliation, by their belonging to the same field.

entrepreneurial university in a monologue lasting almost two hours. We only managed to slip in three of over twenty questions we had prepared. [41]

The examples given here make it clear that some experts obviously refused to engage in the interactional setting of the interview, even though it is an accepted practice within the academic field, and did not settle into, or only partly settled into, their role as respondents. In the case of the exam setting, even a role-reversal took place: it was the interviewers who suddenly found themselves in the role of the respondents.¹⁰ Assuming that the interviewed experts, all of them actors in the academic field, are perfectly familiar with the structure and procedure of research interviews, we argue that the interactional effects discussed here (authority effect, iceberg effect, paternalist behavior) must be interpreted as violations of the rules governing the interview as role play. [42]

For analyzing our interviews we try to reflect on these described effects, which make up a sort of backdrop of our interpretations of the interviewees' narratives. These effects can be fundamental pointers for defining the interviewees' positions within the academic field more precisely. [43]

5. Summary and Short Prospect

According to the interaction model of the interview interaction dynamics and their effects (which may never be entirely eliminated) can be made productive for the process of collecting data as well as for their interpretation. What we tried to show in this article is that interaction effects may appear as unexpected *side products* rather than calculable and controllable variables—even if the theoretical preparation was done well. While doing fieldwork, we successively noticed that not only our prepared positioning as interviewers (as co-experts, accomplices or critics) influenced the interview situations, but also the interviewees' perceptions both of us as interviewers and of our research project's aim. Therefore, we started re-analyzing our interview transcriptions and field notes. As our results showed, the interviewees often spoke to us as if we were evaluators of the gender studies curricula. We could differentiate between four (rhetorical) strategies which gave us evidence of the interviewees' perception: 1. members of the university management particularly expressed interest in our findings as the basis for decision-making regarding the gender studies curricula's future; 2. the gender studies-actors themselves preferred to use our findings to support their own interests and defend their aims against the university higher-ups; 3. many of our interviewees described the gender studies curricula in exclusively positive terms; 4. members of the university management emphasized that gender studies are part of an increasingly competitive academic environment. [44]

Furthermore we tried to sum up types of interactive situations which can occur when researchers interview actors with a higher status in the academic field, as was the case in our survey. For our analysis we claim three effects of interaction, which are the *authority effect*, the *iceberg effect* and the *paternalism effect*. We

¹⁰ VOGEL (1995, pp.80-81) calls such attempts by interviewees to reverse the questioner-respondent relationship "feedback effect."

assume that these effects as well as the interviewees' perception of us as evaluators influenced how and what interviewees told us and what they kept silent. [45]

Therefore, the next step of our analysis will be to use these findings systematically to interpret the collected data: How can we, for example, understand why gender studies-actors in specific interview settings did not tell us about problems relating to the curriculum? How can we understand that some members of the university management brought us into exam situations or dictated what was talked about? Or why did gender studies-actors turn us into their accomplices while we tried to act as critics? [46]

We are convinced that these questions will help us to reconstruct legitimizing and justification strategies and to detect modes of argumentation adopted by the respondents to reach their aims and to assert their interests. We generally plead that researchers should look out more carefully for interaction dynamics when interpreting data, as they also might be pointers to tensions, conflicts or opposing perspectives, phenomena which won't be noticed otherwise. [47]

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