Qualitative Researchers—Stories Told, Stories Shared: The Storied Nature of Qualitative Research. An Introduction to the Special Issue: *FQS* Interviews I

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Abstract: We present our rationale for this special interview issue. The interview as experienced in everyday life is contrasted with the interview as a critical research tool in qualitative research. In using the qualitative interview ourselves we learn about the professional and intellectual development of those who helped to create the foundations of qualitative research. We learn about qualitative research as a specific field of instruction, as method and theory, as writing, and practice. A discussion of the various types of interviews included in this issue is followed by a discussion of how technological advances will provide us with considerably more interview options in the future.

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1. Why a Special Issue of Interviews?

Why a special issue of interviews? Why interviews with these particular people? Allow us to explain. [1]

We have nurtured the idea of publishing an *FQS* special issue on interviews with qualitative researchers for some time. Being an interdisciplinary and international forum for qualitative researchers we are very interested in initiating exchange and discourse beyond disciplinary and national boundaries, and we believe that interviews are a fitting way to accomplish this: Interviews provide insight into the richness and variety of qualitative research and in the ideas, concepts, and

(professional) biographies of those who have contributed to the development and promotion of this research tradition. With *FQS* we have the instrument and the style that permits understanding of the link between researchers and the products (and conditions of production) of their research; because of the special frame of an interview, the interviewed person becomes more visible and the "work" more understandable. [2]

1.1 Interviews as parts of daily life

Interviews have become a part of our daily lives. We read interviews in the press; we see people interviewed on television; many of us know of the "celebrity" interview. One consequence of this familiarity is a tendency to simplify: An interviewer asks the interviewee questions—a question eliciting an answer (GUBRIUM & HOLSTEIN 2002) However, the interview in qualitative research is a critical method in much of the work many of us do. Unlike the interview of the "popular" media with its rigid question and answer format, the interview in qualitative research comes in many guises, as can be seen in this issue. It goes beyond mere fact gathering and attempts to construct meaning and interpretation in the context of conversation (KVALE 1996). [3]

The interview as a way to gather information is of fairly recent origin; there being a time when an interview as such did not exist. Of course, as BENNEY and HUGHES (1956) point out, people have always asked questions and most of the time people have responded, but these encounters would not be perceived as an interview. The emergence of the interview only came about when the roles "interviewer" and "interviewee" became formalized. [4]

The development of interviews reflected changing relationships between individuals. It gradually became commonplace for "strangers" to ask questions of one another to gain knowledge. RIESMAN and BENNEY (1956) see this change as the result of "the modern temper." More recently, David SILVERMAN (1997), seeing the widespread use and impact of interviews on contemporary life, has suggested that we live in an "interview society" (p.248). Among the conditions required by an interview society, SILVERMAN sees an informing subjectivity—the evolution of a self as an object of narration. This can come about only when individuals *qua* respondents are perceived as offering meaningful knowledge to share with others. Interpersonally, this is seen in the democratization of the interpretations of one's experiences; individuals are seen as "significant commentators on their own experience" (GUBRIUM & HOLSTEIN 2002, p.5). What this means, in part, is that the traditional roles of interviewer and interviewee have become more fluid. Individuals are able to come together in dialogue and meaningfully discuss their experiences. [5]

We see a transformation of the individual through the interview. The interview gives individuals appropriate outlets through which their experiences and thoughts can be shared with others in meaningful interactions. But, given the widespread use of interviews, have they, the interviews, transformed society? GUBRIUM and HOLSTEIN (2002) rightly suggest that interviews have prepared

us "as both questioners and answerers to produce readily the society of which we are a part. The modern temper gives us the interview as a significant means for realizing that subjectivity and the social contexts that bring it about" (p.9). [6]

1.2 Using qualitative interviews to interview qualitative researchers

KVALE (1996) has likened the qualitative interview to "wandering together with" the interviewee. He sees the interviewer as a traveling companion of the interviewee trying to elicit his or her "stories of the lived world" (p.4)—if we genuinely want to hear, to understand an individual we must provide a way for her or him to speak in a genuine voice. As qualitative researchers interviewing other qualitative researchers it would not do to simply ask questions and await responses; that would be antithetical to the notion of a qualitative interview: Our goal for the interviews in this issue is that they do reveal the interviewees' stories of their lived world, in their genuine voices. [7]

What voices have been included? As qualitative research is a poly-vocal endeavor, our aim was to present a variety of approaches important for qualitative research—symbolic interaction, discourse theory, constructionism, psychoanalysis, and hermeneutics are some of them. Furthermore, those of us who do qualitative research are following the lead of scholars who saw the need for other ways to do social science; who saw that experimental methods and statistical analyses did not pave the royal road to the truth. We are in the enviable position that many of those scholars are still with us, still working, and have much to teach us. Therefore this special interview issue of *FQS* allows those scholars to share with us their stories, in the best qualitative tradition. Through these interviews we are able to bring together the researcher—the person—and the work. It is important to be able to put a name, a face, with the research; it helps to humanize it. [8]

The interviews presented reveal the cultural, historical, and theoretical contexts in which the interviewees helped to shape qualitative research. We also learn about their personal histories: who influenced them and what motivated them to seek their own way. As they may inspire us it is important to know who inspired them; thus, giving us a sense of the history of the research traditions in which we work. For example Aaron CICOUREL inspired generations of qualitative researchers because of his methods of criticism and methodological reflections. Others like Anselm STRAUSS were genuine founders of qualitative methodologies; Juliet CORBIN, for example, helped to significantly develop such methodologies. Bob DICK gives us important insights into action research; Carolyn ELLIS and Art BOCHNER offer reflections on auto/ethnography; Ken and Mary GERGEN serve as representatives for a constructionist perspective; Maja NADIG discusses her attempt to integrate constructionist epistemologies into (ethno-) psychoanalytical research. Others had been forerunners in using the Internet: Judith PREISSLE with QUALRS-L, a mailing list for "Qualitative Research for the Human Sciences, launched in 1991, and Ron CHENAIL, who in 1990 initiated the first online journal on qualitative research. Both give instructive examples for others on how to use the Internet; for example Janice MORSE and her e-journal and us at *FQS*. In

developing *FQS* we did not set out to copy our forerunners but to learn from them how to create new tools and to develop new perspectives in bringing together different research cultures and traditions (see MRUCK 2000). Others, like Gerhard KLEINING, Hans-Georg SOEFFNER and Hans THOMAE, give in-depth insights into the rich and diverse development of qualitative research within Germany and help us to understand its disciplinary and national embeddedness. [9]

2. What We Learn About Qualitative Research

Qualitative research has enjoyed widespread recognition and use around the world. The last decade, for example, has seen a tremendous increase in the publishing of textbooks on qualitative methods (SEALE, GOBO, GUBRIUM & SILVERMAN 2004). Often in textbooks knowledge is decontextualized; there is no link to practice, and the foundations of methods are often discussed in ways that represent a risky and dangerous tendency to oversimplification of traditions, research designs, epistemology and some relevant methodological issues. [10]

Following this idea we identified qualitative researchers to share with us their testimonies. We present 18 voices, simultaneously speaking about the process of becoming the people we are talking about, with their silences, their motivations, dreams and projects to bring together the diverse experiences of being a qualitative researcher as a process. In some ways our goal was to embody the figure that is usually only a name in the literature. As we describe in the next section, the scenario is neither homogeneous nor is it a new style of writing. Quite the contrary, it is very diverse. But it is this diversity that illustrates in very concrete ways these researcher's ideas and actions. Our interviews reveal that qualitative research is strong and varied; they show us that qualitative inquiry has poly-vocality and is complex. In the end, it is the result of a lived life, of an individual with a different voice, a different world view. [11]

It cannot be in any other mode because qualitative research is a very specific human condition, it is a way to hear, to see, to feel, to write, to go everywhere. Being a "qualitative person" means something different to the positivistic side of your brain, to your body and your experience dealing with another human being. [12]

Importantly, we learn from these interviews that there is no single history, no single place in which qualitative research emerged. As qualitative research emerged it was shaped by the *Ortsgeist and Zeitgeist*. We also learn that qualitative research is not a male dominated endeavor—female researchers have equally shaped it. Thus, we see that what we call qualitative research has a rich and varied history, shaped by scholars in many disciplines, both men and women, from around the world. [13]

2.1 Qualitative research as a specific field of instruction

Teaching about the process of understanding another person's experience has been an important activity from the time of MEAD, THOMAS, HEIDEGGER and BRENTANO. Qualitative methods as a specific field of instruction is an on-going

process and we are still surprised at the magnitude of the efforts put forth to formalize many of these new courses on universities campus. [14]

We learn about how and what was taught about qualitative research from teaching pioneers such as CICOUREL and STRAUSS in the 1960's, and PREISSLE in the 1970's . But we also learn from Carolyn ELLIS and Arthur BOCHNER that even by the mid 1980's very few institutions had integrated qualitative oriented courses. We see through Ron CHENAIL's eyes the time when teaching qualitative research was so new that there were no texts, few journal articles, and no online journals. From Gerhard KLEINING we learn how creative ways were used in the early days to give lectures and to supervise students. [15]

Understanding what was involved in organizing and teaching the first courses in qualitative methods and how they shaped institutions need to be recognized by the next generation of qualitative researchers in order for them to fully understand the contemporary state of the art and to understand the relevance of new methods of learning and thinking about dialogue and collective remembering, just as Wolf-Michael ROTH and Ken TOBIN have done. [16]

2.2 Qualitative research as method and theory

This interview issue gives us the chance to learn from Hans-Georg SOEFFNER about the hermeneutic sociology of knowledge and its links to single methods, and to enjoy Anselm STRAUSS' wonderful memories, in what could be, sadly, one of the last interviews he gave. Aaron CICOUREL reflects on methodological issues and on the complexity and difficulty of conducting interviews, planning studies and managing research projects. [17]

We learn about the theoretical and inspiring sources of "biographical research" from Hans THOMAE. Gerhard KLEINING describes the long history of establishing qualitative research in Germany. If you are interested in discovering the association between qualitative research and critical psychology in the realm of LACANian, postmodern and Marxist ideas, undoubtedly you will learn much from Ian PARKER's interview, who also offers an interesting way to distinguish between constructivist and discursive approaches. Then you can go to the "performative psychology" presentation of Kenneth GERGEN and think about why constructionism is neither a methodology nor a movement to him. Maya NADIG provides insight in an ethnopsychoanalytic perspective and shows the usefulness of psychoanalysis for qualitative research, especially if linked to a constructionist epistemology. [18]

Mixed methods are increasingly becoming the focus of many discussions, conferences, and courses. Janice MORSE is very critical about this trend and points out the relevance of theory development in overcoming the simple accumulation of descriptions. For another point of view about qualitative research we have the reconstruction of emotional sociology and micro-macro level discussions that ELLIS and BOCHNER have prepared for us. [19]

2.3 Qualitative research as writing

In this issue we are also given the chance to think about creative writing as a way to do qualitative research. Here, the "evocative" power of Carolyn ELLIS is a necessary presence. Mary GERGEN's biographic narrative piece (as constructed by Kip JONES) is just a subtle invitation to explore new forms of qualitative and personal inquiry. Probably, this is the "duography" Kenneth GERGEN was talking about in his e-mail interview. Ultimately, CORBIN's ideas about writing novels compared to writing Grounded Theory studies are a symptom of the very interesting process of the "narrative" turn. [20]

2.4 Qualitative research as a practice

Regardless of what sort of theoretical or methodological preferences our experts may embrace, they forged changes in the actual ways of doing qualitative research. We can find colleagues thinking as action research methodologists or as contructionists, as Bob DICK or Ken GERGEN, respectively, tell us about. We can also find qualitative researchers analyzing behaviors in hospitals or in schools, comparing the experiences of Janice MORSE or Judith PREISSLE or Aaron CICOUREL. Any of us doing autoethnography or Grounded Theory studies had to learn from Carolyn ELLIS or Anselm STRAUSS or Juliet CORBIN. Anyone working in family therapy or doing discursive and critical psychology must know of the contributions of Ron CHENAIL and Ian PARKER. [21]

Those scholars interviewed in this issue, and those for whatever reasons are not included, must be seen as being "on the road," leading the way for the rest of us. Among our hopes is that the next generation of qualitative researchers will be educated, amused, and, most importantly, inspired by these colleagues. [22]

3. Some Methodological Remarks to the Interview Issue

As we began planning the issue we asked ourselves if we should make suggestions concerning how the interviews should be conducted. Our suggestions to the interviewees, the "experts," and interviewers were not intended to be rules; rather our suggestions were to help us get a clear outline of how such an issue might look. We came up with a list of basic questions that would provide a general framework for how the interviews would look. The following topics were given to the interviewers; and in some cases to the interviewees:

- What influences, motivations, perspectives were especially important for you in becoming and being a qualitative researcher? (Talking about the context of the work and, if possible, also more personally about becoming and being a qualitative researcher.)
- What do you consider to be your major contribution to qualitative research? What do you expect for the future? If applicable: What were the

> circumstances that caused you to change the course or style of your research? What made it necessary to do so?

- In your view what are the most important developments in qualitative research in general and within your specific discipline (and beyond it)? (Discuss in more detail the nature of interdisciplinary work within your specific discipline and from an international perspective.)

- What central challenges did you face, both generally and in terms of your discipline and country? And what do you see as being future challenges? [23]

These questions reflected a type of interview that is both a "biographic interview" (especially questions 1 and 2) and an "expert interview"[1] (questions 3 and 4). With a combination of these two types of questions we hoped to gain insights into the "Work" and the individual.

- Our hope was that the biographical interview would allow the researcher to tell her or his "story." Our interest was the actor's view on his or her life but not in talking about the private/intimate stories of the person for their own sake; we are not voyeurs. Rather, the private stories are interesting in regards to the stories of qualitative research; our queries link the private and "professional" stories; we are interested in the life course of becoming and being a qualitative researcher. We want to know about the people and circumstances that nurtured and fostered their development.

- Regarding the specific content of the interviews, one of our aims was to allow the opportunity for the interviewees to think about topics/themes/content in a new way and to reflect upon and link their experiences and perceptions (KRAMP 2004), and to talk about new ideas and perspectives. And in an interview it is easier to talk about or debate ideas than in a typical academic article. [24]

3.1 Different interviewing and conversation styles

The interviews published were gathered in various ways. Most of the interviewees were contacted directly by the editors of the issue, or by Katja MRUCK as the main editor of *FQS*. In some cases the issue editors suggested that the prospective interviewers should contact the interviewees; in other cases the issue editors told colleagues about the idea of an interview issue and these colleagues suggested interviewees. Some of the interviews have been taken from the German "Journal für Psychologie": Permission to reprint was granted for the interviews with Anselm STRAUSS, Hans THOMAE and Maya NADIG, originally published in German. In addition, permission was granted to publish for the first time the "original" English texts of the interviews with Ken GERGEN and Ian PARKER (which were previously only published in German). All of the "reprints"

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1 See for example MEUSER and NAGEL (1991) for the "expert interview" and SCHÜTZE (1983) or WENGRAF (2001; see KALEKIN-FISHMAN 2002 for a Review Essay) for the "biographic interview."

were revised and expanded for this issue. Some interviews were planned but were not conducted or were conducted too late to be included in this issue.[2] [25]

Frequently, interviews published in newspapers, magazines or (scientific) journals, follow a very rigid and fixed format: question and answers. Reflecting on this, these types of interviews often reveal little. [26]

In this issue all interviewers were encouraged to use their own style; we did not define *how* the interviews should be conducted. Therefore there are important differences, expressing different kinds of conversation styles, different ways of conducting interviews, and different types of presentation—representing a special kind of scientific text: There are interviews in which the interviewer is essentially "invisible"[3]; that is, she or he asks few questions and provides occasional interjections of agreement with a point made by the interviewee. In contrast we find interviews that are more structured and contain many questions, and interviews qua conversations or dialogues that look more like an exchange of ideas (one interview—ROTH and TOBIN—is explicitly titled as co-generative dialoguing), rather than the typical question and answer format. [27]

3.2 Different kinds of interviews

In addition to the common face-to-face interviews (which dominates qualitative research) with Juliet CORBIN / Janice MORSE / Anselm STRAUSS / Hans THOMAE / Hans-Georg SOEFFNER / Carolyn ELLIS & Arthur BOCHNER / Gerhard KLEINING / Maya NADIG, two other types of interviews were used: the telephone interview (with Judith PREISSLE / Ron CHENAIL), and e-mail interviews with Ian PARKER / Ken GERGEN / Bob DICK / Aaron CICOUREL / Michael ROTH & Ken TOBIN / Mary GERGEN. In the case of the interview with Mary GERGEN, the interviewer used a mixture of styles: beginning the interview by asking her to tell her life story; she audio-taped her narrative and sent it to the interviewer, who asked additional questions by e-mail, after the interview tape had been transcribed. [28]

Because of the relative novelty of e-mail, we feel a few remarks about the (dis-) advantages of e-mail interviewing are in order. Among the advantages of using e-mail for interviews is that it allows the interviewee to respond whenever he or she likes and when time permits. Interviews can be conducted between people living on different continents and in different time zones. E-mail interviews can be conducted without traveling. And there is no need to transcribe the verbal data, because the response has already been written. On the other hand, because the e-mail interview takes place asynchronously, the elements of surprise and puzzlement are partly lost (see MEY & MRUCK [1998] for some remarks and

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2 Some of these interviews will be published in upcoming issues separately. With the current issue we formally introduce the rubric "Interview." This new rubric is added to the existing rubrics: Review begun in issue 1(2), Debate also begun in issue *1*(2), and Conferences begun in issue *4*(1). And we are sure—depending on the response to this issue—that we will publish another special issue with interviews.

3 DEVEREUX (1967) gives in his criticism of naïve understand of methodology some interesting remarks about "visibility" in "invisibility."

reflections on how to manage an e-mail interview using an interview with Jaan VALSINER as an example), although many personal themes and stories also emerge in e-mail correspondence. For future interviews, also synchronous interviewing / live chat-interviews will be used. In addition, web-cam will allow us to make the artificial electronic situation more like a "real-life" situation, and by exploiting the protocol function of chats no transcribing needs to be done. [29]

The relevance of e-mails is also obvious in the case of "face-to-face" interviews. Numerous e-mail exchanges took place after the interviews had been transcribed and the transcripts were prepared for publication and also during the authorization process. These e-mail exchanges occasionally led to additional questions being asked, new topics covered, and sometimes leading to completely new discussions. During these ongoing and extended e-mail exchanges it was possible for the interviewer and interviewee to take on more active and different roles. As interviews were submitted to us for review and copy-editing we, as editors, pointed out to the interviewers that some questions we thought pertinent were not asked. With this in mind it is possible in the future to expect that the role of the interviewer will change, and that during the whole process of interviewing, different interviewers will ask different questions, similar to a discussion between an expert and a group of questioners—but in this case done asynchronously. It is the polyphonic transformation of the interview. And at last we are able to go one step further. Because of the interactive nature of an on-line journal, and *FQS* specifically, after the interviews are published it will be possible for the readers to discuss the interviews, ask questions of the interviewees by using the discussion board or by sending e-mails directly to the interviewees or issue editors. [30]

3.3 Different kinds of presentation

Most published interviews do not reflect the amount of effort and thought that went into it, nor do they give insight into the contexts in which the interviews were conducted; in most cases only scant information is provided about the time and place of the interview. The published interviews have been edited to make them more readable. Even if the unedited transcript, with its additional cues and extra-linguistic features, were included it would still not reflect the "original" situation. [31]

The Internet offers us many options to explore. With no space constraints and the possibility of using different kinds of files it will be possible to present interviews in a variety of forms. The Internet allows us to publish along side the "cleaned-up" interview the "original," offering thick descriptions or ethnographic protocols (see for example the presentation of Marilyn LICHTMAN and the first part of the interview with Juliet CORBIN—in both cases having to overcome technical problems with audio-taping). We envision the presentation of this kind of "original" text as offering an illustration to readers (seasoned qualitative researchers and beginning students) of the types of problems that can arise in conducting interviews. Students will be happy to know that the "professionals" and "experts" have problems too. Another option is presenting the interview translated into a composition (interpretation) by using citations and visualizing these with photographs and the experimental layout—as Kip JONES has done. At

first these composition could be seen as the most edited kind of text. However, one must remember that most other published interviews are new texts that have little to do with the original conversation. In most cases, the interviews in this issue can be labeled as "journalistic interviews": all verbal mistakes, confused thoughts/unclear sentences, and lengthy pauses, are deleted or "cleaned-up." Preparing the interviews in this fashion results in a nice, clean formatted product, but often at the expense of really getting to know the interviewee. With the advantages of being an electronic journal, we could publish, in addition to the edited interview, the audiotape of the interview, allowing our readers to eavesdrop on the dialogue between the interviewer and interviewee, at last giving them a chance to see the interviewee in possibly a new light. [32]

But we also want to expand what can be done with technology. For instance, we are considering ways that will allow readers to be more visible in the discussion. We will try to find ways to conduct interviews with qualitative researchers by offering a live chat or by inviting our readers to send questions to the editors who will carry out the interview based on those questions. [33]

There is still much to do in this direction. Even this issue can help to illustrate the difficulties and promises involved in presenting multiple voices sharing personal experiences. It would be an excellent outcome to combine these testimonials in an entire narrative piece in which all of our interviewees "perform" together his or her discourse. Other possibilities include introducing more digital elements (e.g., audio and video) in the corresponding URL, and exploring alternative ways of interviewing as expressed in drawing, photography, autoethnography, and so on. [34]

Finally, let us express our aim for this special interview issue of *FQS*. Regardless of how the interview was conducted, the format in which you read it, our intention is that you get to know those interviewed, that you get to know them as individuals, as thinkers, as researchers, that you come to understand why they have chosen the path of qualitative researcher, what it means to them, and ... to you. [35]

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