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RESEARCH DESIGN IN INTERVIEW STUDIES

AS IN any other genre of science, research using qualitative interviewing does not just happen by chance, but is designed by researchers. What sets research interviews apart from everyday conversations is the much greater extent to which they are planned and reflected upon in advance—and subsequently analyzed. In everyday life, we generally just follow the conversational flows with the people we meet, but qualitative interviews are prepared, conducted, analyzed, and reported according to some kind of plan or what is normally referred to as a research design. Some designs imply a tight structuring of the research process while others are much more loose and flexible, but even the most stretchy and negotiable design is still a design (which serves some purposes better than others). In other words, my claim is that one cannot *not* design an interview study, for even the conscious choice of omitting any preparation and just talking to people around one about something is also to have chosen a design (which, in most cases, however, will probably not be conducive to knowledge production).

In this chapter, I will discuss a number of issues that should be taken into account when considering research designs in qualitative interviewing. I outline a well tried-out step-wise approach to design that is informative of *what* to do, *when* to do it, and

why do this rather than that in the research process. I will introduce some conceptual distinctions between inductive, deductive, and abductive designs, and I shall refer to three examples from paradigmatic interview studies to show more concretely how different designs enable different research processes and results. Some projects are designed for discovery and generally demand a quite disciplined analytic awareness, while others are designed more for understanding something and come close to ethnographic research that seeks to take advantage of whatever conversations emerge in the field that the researcher is interested in. It is also possible to design a study in order to construct something new (new practices or new kinds of public discussions).

Going Through an Interview Study

Some approaches to interviewing focus almost exclusively on the concrete encounter between an interviewer and an interviewee. In contrast to this, I will here argue that a well-designed interview project has a thread that runs through the entire process and connects the research question with what goes on in the interview and also with subsequent transcription, analysis, and reporting. Thus, when designing an interview study, and also when readers evaluate the appropriateness of different designs, it can be helpful to think through the process in a step-wise manner. Here I break the process down into four common steps: *Preparation*, *interviewing*, *analysis*, and *reporting*.

These should not be thought of as discrete phases, but are generally overlapping and cyclic, so that one may, for example, return to one's interviewees and conduct additional interviews after having analyzed their initial statements, or even re-thematize the entire project upon recognizing that the project has come off to a misguided start and in fact concerns something other than one had first imagined. Whether one prefers tight or loose designs, one should always make the best of the flexible and inductive research logic that normally guides qualitative research. This makes possible an iterative design—a form of designing-as-we-go-along—which is normally a vice in quantitative and experimental research, where the 99th research participant must be treated in exactly the same way as the 1st participant in order to ensure reliability. But in qualitative

research, it can be a virtue to amend one's design in the process. It would be foolish to continue with a bad interview guide that does not result in valid answers, for example, if it turns out after a couple of interviews that the guide is problematic. Of course, any amendments should be carefully noted and reflected upon (and when relevant, should also be mentioned in the final report), and it is advisable for interview researchers to use a log book to keep track of the decisions that are made throughout the process, as these are often difficult to reconstruct correctly in hindsight.

Preparation

The first thing to consider when preparing an interview study is to make clear what one wants to study. What is the theme that one is interested in? People's life stories, experiences, or actions? The second thing is to consider whether qualitative interviewing is suitable for the given research theme. In their book on designing qualitative research, Marshall and Rossman (2006) argue that there are three broad areas of study to which qualitative methods can favorably be applied (p. 55):

- Individual lived experience.
- Language and communication.
- Society and culture.

Qualitative interviews can be used, and have been used, to study aspects of all three, but they lend themselves most naturally to the study of individual lived experience. In fact, when one wants to know how an individual experiences some phenomenon, interviewing has a certain primacy among the different methods. Interviews can also be used to study language and communication, since human beings use the interview situation itself to communicate through language. But generalizing from communicative processes in the interview situation to the broader world of human communication is a thorny issue. If one wants to study "naturally occurring talk" (e.g. how doctors communicate with patients), it can be important to obtain naturalistic data rather than just interviewing people about how they believe they communicate outside the interview context. Finally, since society and culture are co-constituted by conversational processes such as interviews,

qualitative interviewing remains a relevant method for studying these aspects of the social world; but, again, it can be quite important to use other sources of data (e.g. observations, documents, cultural objects) to get a more complete picture. Qualitative interviewing is very often a relevant method, but it is not always a sufficient method vis-à-vis the phenomenon of interest.

It is not uncommon, however, to find that people have fallen in love with interviewing as a method, and then seek to apply it to answer questions that are ill-suited for this kind of method. Judging from my experience as a teacher of qualitative interviewing, it happens quite often that novice interviewers want to know, for example, if it makes a difference (in relation to a given subject matter) whether people are men or women, young or old, or homosexual or heterosexual. In small projects, they then recruit, say, two women and two men and ask them about their opinions about something. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with this, but the problem arises when the researchers want to use this limited material to draw conclusions about general differences between men and women (for example). For, obviously, it is entirely possible that the selected men have opinions that are stereotypically associated with women (and vice versa).

The problem is that interviewers very often have inherited a research logic taken from experimental research and see this as *the* scientific method, intent, as it is, to investigate differences between groups. So they wish to have a "control group," let us say of men, in order to verify whether their understandings of women are valid. This runs counter to a genuine qualitative research logic, and in fact makes very little sense. If I want to make an interpretation of the works of William Shakespeare, it would be quite strange to demand that I use Homer or Dante as controls. Or, if I were to conduct fieldwork in rural Russia, what sense would there be in demanding that I use an urban area in the United States as a control? Naturally, it can be very interesting to do comparative studies in qualitative research (as the study described in Box 2.2 below will exemplify), but this must be done in very careful, analytic ways and is usually quite different from testing a hypothesis about general differences between groups. Qualitative interviewers need to be aware that qualitative research functions differently from experimental research, and that the whole idea of using controls in this way normally makes little sense.

In qualitative interviewing, we should in general pose research questions that contain a "how" instead of a "how much." A research question such as "How do young people experience being admitted to hospital?" is generally preferable to the comparative question "Are women more anxious than men when admitted to hospital?" The latter question invites us to think in terms of causes, effects, and control groups, and in order to answer the question in a statistical sense, one would need a large number of interviewees. A question like "How do people cope with the loss of a loved one?" is in general better for qualitative projects than questions that seek to find causal effects, such as "Does psychotherapy reduce the risk of depression after a loss?" The latter question is interesting and relevant, but it is also extremely difficult to answer with qualitative interviewing. Instead, one would need to enlist a large number of research participants, administrate standardized tests, and compare the effects statistically in order to assess whether the findings are statistically significant, i.e., not just a chance result. In most cases, it is relevant to conduct qualitative interviews when one wants to know about how people experience something, reason about something, or act in relation to something. The result of an interview study may well be (and often is) that people do so in different ways (and the researcher can for example construct a typology of ways of experiencing, reasoning, or acting in order to show this), but this is different from saying that being a man/woman is causing one to experience something in a given way.

Design questions that should be answered when preparing an interview study are generally of five broad kinds: *What* should be studied? *Why* is it relevant to do so? *How* should the subject matter be studied? *Who* should be interviewed—and *how many*? I will deal with each question in turn.

- *What* should be studied? The question of *what* should always be addressed before the question of which methods to use. One should employ the methods that suit the theme rather than skew the theme to make it fit preconceived ideas about methods. As discussed above, the strength of qualitative interviewing is its ability to throw light on the *hows* of human action and experience: How is something *done* (e.g. patienthood), and how is something *experienced* (e.g. anxiety) can favorably be studied using qualitative interviewing. So, in general, it is helpful to formulate one's research

interest in terms of a list of hows. At this stage, it is also relevant to reflect upon methodology in a more overarching way—for example, is the researcher aiming to discover something unknown about how people do X, to construct a better way of doing X, or to understand how people experience X? (I return to the models of *discovery, construction,* and *understanding* below). It is also relevant to consider the philosophy of science that one adheres to (implicitly or explicitly). There can be quite a difference between approaching the human world as a range of conversational exchanges (a perspective found in discourse analysis and conversation analysis, for example), and conceiving of the human world as a reality that is structured by intentional acts of human consciousness (a perspective found in parts of phenomenology, for example).

• *Why* is it relevant to study this? The human world is rich and varied, and it is possible to raise an endless number of questions that can be answered using qualitative interviewing. But not all questions are equally relevant, and I believe that there is an ethical obligation to use the privileges one has as a researcher to study phenomena that are relevant, and where there might even be a chance that the results of the study may improve the world (however little this may be). This is not to say that all research projects should be directly relevant to a certain practice, for example, for basic research also may be very enlightening for human beings. Sometimes it is the case that what initially appears "useless" may turn out to be the most useful. But most readers of interview reports will quite legitimately expect the qualitative researcher to have given thought to why this piece of research is relevant, and to whom it might be relevant. As the critical psychologist Ian Parker has put it, as researchers we are "always participating in the activity of either reproducing the way the world is or transforming it" (Parker, 2005, p. 13), and there can be quite a difference between designing for reproduction and designing for transformation. Should the interviewees, for example, be expected to be enlightened and lead better lives upon having participated in the study? And what are the ethical challenges in this kind of transformative research (cf. the discussion of transformative interviewing in Chapter 1)?

Furthermore, qualitative inquiry has grown and expanded and is now an enormous field, and it is very often the case that other researchers have already studied the phenomenon that one

is interested in. Has the researcher done an adequate literature review that enables her to assess whether her own questions may contribute with something new? "Because I can!" is not a good answer when asked about why you want to study something, and there is in today's qualitative research—as in all other forms of research as well—an enormous amount of repetitions that do not teach us anything substantially new. The sad truth is that one specific implicit answer to why it is relevant to study something is dominant, viz. that it is relevant because the researcher has an aim of getting tenure or living up to a publication pressure. In such cases, it can be argued that the researcher could make better use of her time by studying something that could actually make a difference to people (and hopefully enable her to get tenure in the process!).

Someone who has put a lot of emphasis on the relevance aspects of human and social science is Bent Flyvbjerg (2001). In a book on how to make the social sciences matter (i.e. how to make them *relevant*), he has argued that the social sciences must become *phronetic*, which means that they must conceive of themselves as practical sciences that are involved in the societal subject matters that they study. *Phronetic* researchers place themselves within the context being studied and focus on the values of the practices of communities by asking three "value-rational" questions: Where are we going? Is this desirable? What should be done? (p. 60). The raison d'être for the social sciences, Flyvbjerg thinks, is developing the value-rationality of society, i.e., enabling the public to reason better about its values and social practices. This is just one approach to the why-question of qualitative studies, which argues that, ideally, qualitative research is valid when it enables people to improve the practice that is studied.

As a bridge between "why" and "how," it is also relevant to consider the ethical aspects of interview research. Ethical aspects concern both the *why*, as we have seen, and obviously also the *how*, since research should proceed concretely in an ethically sound manner. This involves asking questions about one's own project. These questions include:

Possible *beneficial* consequences of the study: Can the study improve the lives of human beings in any way?

How to obtain *informed consent*. This can be a challenge in qualitative interviewing, since researchers often develop and change their focus in the course of the research process, sometimes making it necessary to inform participants about changes in the direction of the research process and to ask them for renewed consent.

How to protect participants' *confidentiality*. This is particularly relevant in qualitative inquiry, where researchers often deal with intimate aspects of people's lives.

The *consequences* of the study for the participants: Is there a risk that they can be harmed psychologically by taking part in the study, e.g. by engaging in conversations about painful experiences from the past?

In many countries, it is demanded that researchers obtain approval from an ethics committee (often institutionalized at local universities), but it is important not to reduce ethical issues to a "check-list approach," so that one simply goes ahead without further reflection after having gained formal approval. In qualitative research, unexpected ethical questions can easily arise, and it is important to remain open to these questions throughout a project rather than believing that ethical questions can be dealt with once and for all before a project is initiated. In any case, most readers of interview reports would like to know something about how the researcher has handled the four ethical issues mentioned here.

• *How* should the subject matter be studied? The question of how is clearly the biggest one, where both theoretical and methodological questions must be raised. Should the interviews be conducted to capture "lived experience" or should they be seen as a form of situated interaction in their own right, for example? Also, more concrete and practical questions must be raised, such as: How can the research questions be translated into an interview guide that makes sense to the interviewees?

The *how* questions cannot of course be answered abstractly, but only concretely, depending on what one wants to find out by conducting the study. The particular context and practicalities of the study are here of paramount importance. If the researcher is asked to deliver a result in two months and is given limited resources for interviewing, transcribing, and analyzing the interviews, then this is obviously very different from a large, well-funded research

project that might go on for years and involve hundreds of interviewees. Too many method books are concerned only (or mainly) with ideal research situations, and do not take concrete situations and barriers into account. But some of the most interesting pieces of research seem in fact to have come from non-planned situations that led to small-scale studies, when researchers simply stumbled upon something that emerged as pressing to study (see Brinkmann, 2012a, for examples and discussions of this kind of research).

When dealing with the *how*, the researcher should first and foremost consider whether interviewing is an appropriate way of answering the questions that interest her. Surprisingly, this consideration is often completely by-passed in reported interview research. Ideally, a research report gives the reader a list of reasons that explain why this particular method was the most relevant one to employ. And, if the answer is affirmative, the researcher should decide whether individual interviews or group interviews are preferable. These different forms of interviews were covered in the previous chapter along with the different media that may structure the conversation (face-to-face, telephone, Internet). Suffice it here to say that individual, face-to-face interviews still represent the standard choice in qualitative interviewing, because of the interpersonal contact, context sensitivity, and flexibility that enables interviewers to take advantage of the research logic of qualitative inquiry.

At a more general level, the *how*-question also implies a decision whether to work inductively, deductively, or abductively (or whether to combine these modes). The following section is adapted from Brinkmann, 2012a):

Induction is the process of recording a number of individual instances (e.g. stories about what it means to learn something new) in order to say something general about the given class of instances (e.g. learning). According to traditional formal logic (which is deductive), inductive inference is not strictly valid, for even if the first 99 girls we have observed do in fact "throw like a girl" (cf. Young, 1980), it may be the case that the 100th does not. Nevertheless, qualitative research is most frequently characterized as inductive, since researchers will often enter the field without too many preconceived ideas to test, but will rather let the empirical world decide which specific questions are worth seeking answers to. Grounded theory is one well-known approach that seeks to

optimize the inductive process in qualitative inquiry (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Some methodologists almost identify qualitative research as such with an inductive approach—e.g. Flick (2002, p. 2), who talks about "traditional deductive methodologies," by which he means quantitative research, being superseded by more adequate qualitative "inductive strategies." But as we shall see later in the chapter, it is indeed possible to work deductively in qualitative interviewing, although it demands a different approach to design. Inductive designs are particularly well suited to study new and emergent phenomena, where it is premature to formulate specific hypotheses.

Deduction is a phase in the knowledge-producing process of deducing testable hypotheses from general ideas or theories, and then seeking to falsify these. In philosophy of science, this theory was famously developed as a general approach to the scientific method by Karl Popper and was known as *falsificationism*. The idea was that only those theories that result in hypotheses that are in principle falsifiable deserve to be called scientific. This, according to Popper, excluded Marx and Freud from the rank of scientists. The deductive model may serve the natural sciences well, but is less helpful as a general model in the human and social sciences. The main problem with the deductive approach (and also with falsificationism) is that in cases where empirical observations apparently contradict one's hypothesis or general theory, scientists often will not know whether to reject their hypothesis or ignore their observations (because they are methodologically weak, for example). That said, researchers using qualitative interviewing can work deductively and use single cases as a test bed for general theories, following a deduction of the form "If this is (not) valid for this case, then it applies to all (no) cases." (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 230). To give an example: If it turns out that even the most abstract forms of human knowledge—mathematics—are situated and acquired contextually, then we have reason to think that all forms of human knowledge are thus situated (Lave, 1988). By studying an extreme case of something, one may become able to deduce general consequences for the entire class of the given something.

To give a more concrete example of how an interview project can be based on a deductive design, we may mention Kvale's classic (1980) study of the classroom effects of grading. The study arose in connection with a new Danish policy of restricted admission to

college based on grade point averages from high school (see also Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008, p. 108). The researchers decided to interview Danish pupils and teachers about their experiences with grading, and they formulated several hypotheses in advance such as (1) Grading influences the process of learning and the social situation where learning occurs, (2) the prevalence of the grading perspective would increase with a restricted admission to college based on grade point averages. These hypotheses were deduced from theories that were prevalent at the time (particularly Marxist ones) about extrinsic motivation for learning in a capitalist society (implying that learning to obtain grades prepares young people to work primarily to obtain an income). Operating with a deductive approach like this demands particular care on behalf of the researchers not to automatically verify the hypotheses (this danger is often referred to as confirmation bias), and, in this case, the research group employed independent coders of the material to ensure high reliability in the interpretations and did many other things to avoid confirmation bias. In any case, this example shows that it is possible to use a deductive model when designing qualitative interview projects, although inductive approaches are much more common.

Both the induction and deduction models normally work best when researchers already know the phenomena that they are studying in the research process (although the deductive model demands much more specificity in this regard). It is tacitly presupposed that we have some stable entity that we can study repeatedly in a number of cases to build general knowledge (induction) or that we already have general ideas from which we can deduce particular consequences to test (deduction). But when we talk about the volatile conversational world of human beings, this is often not the case. Thus, a third kind of reasoning is needed, and fortunately we have what is known as abduction, which is suitable when we wish to study things that are emerging and as yet unknown.

Abduction as a form of reasoning is associated with the pragmatist Charles S. Peirce. Peirce is often credited with being *the* original pragmatist because of his formulation of what has since been known as the "pragmatic maxim": "Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the objects of our conception to have. Then our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object." (quoted from Bernstein, 2010, p. 3). According to Peirce, things *are* their effects.

Abduction is a form of reasoning that we employ in situations of uncertainty; when we need an understanding or explanation of something that happens or some effect. It can be formalized as follows: (1) We observe X; (2) X is unexpected and breaks with our normal understanding; (3) but if Y is the case, then X makes sense; (4) therefore we are allowed to claim Y, at least provisionally. As an example, let us say (1) that we observe a person who waves her arms wildly. And let us say (2) that this is unexpected in the context (the situation is not, for example, an aerobics class). We can then conjecture (3) that an aggressive wasp is attacking the person. This would make the person's behavior understandable, even expected, and therefore (4) we infer that this is the case (at least until we arrive at a better interpretation).

As this example testifies, abduction is a very pervasive form of reasoning in everyday life. And it is likewise widespread, although more implicitly, in interview studies. In most, if not all, forms of qualitative inquiry, there is an abductive aspect, especially connected to (3), which we may refer to as the creative moment in the analytic process. This is when researchers employ their sociological imagination (Mills, 1959) and develop conjectures about how to understand something, which they then test in practice by looking at evidence for and against (this will be exemplified in Box 2.1, where the researchers develop five different conjectures to explain a given phenomenon). From the abductive angle, research is never finished, as the human world itself is never finished, but constantly in the making. Designing interview studies abductively thus means designing for dialoguing with an evolving reality of persons in conversation rather than attempting to formulate theories that are universally true.

To sum up, it is often relevant for readers of interview reports to know whether the study was conceptualized inductively, deductively, or abductively. An inductive approach demands careful exposition of the theme being investigated and a close description of the steps taken from data generation to formulation of general patterns, types, or ideas in the material. A deductive approach has as its key issue how to design in a way that minimizes the risk of confirmation bias, the tendency to have one's hypotheses confirmed. Finally, with an abductive approach, it becomes imperative to justify and check the interpretive conjectures that are voiced by the researcher. Some studies, of course, successfully combine the different approaches at

different stages in the research process (like the study described in Box 2.1 below, when the researcher, Janice Morse, began with an open and inductive approach and, upon discovering a specific phenomenon, developed different hypotheses abductively that were tested in a comparative design with deductive elements).

• *Who* should be interviewed? This is the question of selection and sampling. According to Roulston (who follows LeCompte and Preissle), one needs to draw a distinction between selection and sampling (Roulston, 2010, p. 81). Selection refers to the general decisions concerning who should be in focus in the study (e.g. adults suffering from depression) and sampling refers to the process of finding a subset of the population that has been selected as relevant (e.g. 20 depressed adults, an equal number of women and men, recruited from Clinic X in Y-ville, representing "adults suffering from depression"). In most quantitative studies, the goal is to obtain a representative sample, which may enable researchers to generalize from the sample to the general population. This can also be a goal in qualitative research, but because most qualitative projects aim for thorough analyses in depth—rather than larger and broader analyses—they often employ other sampling strategies.

Sampling becomes a particularly pertinent issue in case-study research, because researchers study just one single case, and Flyvbjerg (2006) discusses a number of different ways of selection, based on different interests.

Random selection can be employed to avoid systematic biases in the sample (here the size of the sample is decisive for generalization, but this is often not relevant for qualitative studies). In general, random selection as a conscious choice is employed only in quantitative projects.

Information-oriented selection is normally more relevant in qualitative inquiry. The goal is here to "maximize the utility of information from small samples and single cases. Cases are selected on the basis of expectations about their information content" (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 230). This means that the researcher's knowledge about the field becomes relevant. With information-oriented selection, the researcher can choose to look for (1) *extreme cases* in order to be able to say something about the phenomenon in its purest form (e.g. adults suffering from *severe* depression),

(2) *maximum variation cases* in order to obtain information about the significance of different and perhaps opposing circumstances (e.g. adults with mild versus severe depression), (3) *critical cases* in order to obtain knowledge that allows for deductions and falsifications, which were discussed above (e.g. "if X is found among most people with mild depression, we have reason to believe it will be found among everyone who suffers from depression"), and (4) *paradigmatic cases* that look for the typical in order, as Flyvbjerg says, to "develop a metaphor or establish a school for the domain that the case concerns" (p. 230). Sometimes qualitative interviewers do not have the luxury of choosing a sampling strategy, but must stick to the respondents that they are able to recruit. Like other forms of selection and sampling, the consequences of this should also be reflected upon in the research report.

Regardless of how one ended up with one's groups of participants, the process of selecting, sampling, and recruiting the participants should be described. Readers of interview reports will also expect the researcher to reflect on possible limitations brought to the study because of the actual group of participants. What does it mean if the participants were "self-selected" as volunteers? Does it matter if the researcher accepted "who she could find" as participants, without being able to select among them? Does it matter if the group is skewed in terms of gender, social position, or ethnicity for example?

• *How many* interviews need to be conducted? This is arguably the most typical question raised by interviewers at research courses, but also readers of interview reports will often ask whether the number of people interviewed was sufficiently high (normally they do not ask whether it was sufficiently low, although this question may also be relevant). People frequently ask this question with a quantitative logic in mind: The more interviews, the more valid and reliable the analysis will be. But this is rarely the case. As Kvale has said, the only logical answer to the question "How many interviews should I conduct?" is: "Interview as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know." (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008, p. 113). If the goal of one's study is to find out how it is to be Barack Obama, then it might be sufficient to interview just this one person. If the researcher has given careful thought to how to select interviewees, a small number of interviews may be enough

to answer one's research question. If the point is, for example, to test whether a supposed general feature exists in some population, then it might suffice to interview a few critical cases (e.g. those cases where it is least likely to find the feature, and if it is found there, it is likely to be found everywhere).

Normally, fewer interviews that are thoroughly analyzed are preferable to many interviews that are only superficially explored. It is always relevant to bear Harry Wolcott's maxim in mind: "Do less, more thoroughly" (Wolcott, 2009, p. 95). Qualitative interviewing distinguishes itself by its ability to get close to people's lives, not by including a huge number of participants. One cannot get close to the lives of 50 or 100 people in an interview study. If, for some reason, such a large number of participants is needed, a survey would possibly have been better and more economical. And if the study has included 50 participants, but only the voices of a handful of people are reported (which is not unusual), then the reader easily becomes skeptical: What happened to all the other people who were interviewed? Did their words not matter to the researcher? As a rule of thumb, it can be said that interview studies tend to have around 15 participants, which is a number that makes possible a practical handling of the data (although l5 interviews of 20 transcribed pages equals 300 pages to be analyzed, which is quite a bit). The aim is not statistical representativeness (although it can be, e.g. in mixed methods studies), but instead the chance to look in detail at how selected people experience the world.

Interviewing

The preparation phase, with its many considerations about theme and research approach (induction, deduction, abduction), should also include a review of extant literature and normally ends with the creation of an interview guide, which is also sometimes referred to as an interview protocol (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The guide translates the research questions (e.g. "How do young people in late modernity experience transitions?") into questions that can be posed to interviewees in a language that makes sense to them (e.g. "Could you please describe what happened when you moved away from your parents' house?). Some interviewers prefer a simple list of questions in a specific order, whereas others

prefer a page with two columns, one with research themes on one side and another with interview questions that reflect the different themes on the other side. This makes it possible for the interviewer to get an overview of where she is in the conversational process and likely ensures that all relevant themes are covered. It is preferable to memorize the guide as much as possible in order to be able to maintain eye contact with the interviewee. This also facilitates a flexible approach to the order of the questions, and may allow the interviewee to cover something that the interviewer had only expected to touch upon later in the conversation.

Interviewers should think about whether a receptive style or a more assertive style is preferable. For sensitive and personal topics, a supportive, receptive, or responsive approach is often helpful (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In their introduction to responsive interviewing, Rubin and Rubin emphasize flexibility of design and highlight the interviewer's acceptance of what interviewees say, along with a need for adjusting "to the personalities of both conversational partners." (p. 7). On the other hand, if the goal is to study how people justify their beliefs, deliberate about difficult matters, or give accounts of their opinions, a more confrontational style may be required, which demands particular ethical sensitivity in order to ensure that the conversation is conducted respectfully.

Different styles of interviewing were covered extensively in the previous chapter, and I shall not repeat myself here, but merely emphasize once more that it is preferable to create some sort of alignment between one's research interest, interview style, and the kind of analysis that one expects to carry out. For example, if one's research interest is to capture illness narratives, then it is important to create a corpus of stories from the participants that lend themselves to narrative analysis. It then becomes important to ask interviewees to produce narratives, which can be done quite simply by asking "Could you tell me the story of what happened when you received the diagnosis?" Small linguistic guides (e.g. to "tell the story" instead of "describe the situation" or "reflect upon the meaning of…") often prove to be immensely important when the material is to be analyzed in the next step. Likewise—even if it may sound trivial—if the goal is to analyze the phenomenological essences of particular experiences, then it is pertinent to ask for concrete descriptions; or if the research interest concerns people's

account-giving practices, the interviewer should not forget to ask people to give accounts, such as by justifying opinions or answering other why-questions.

Analysis

When the interviews have been conducted, a more focused analytic phase begins. Like the other phases, analysis is not reserved to a post hoc interpretation of transcripts, because the analytic task already begins during the interviews, e.g. when interviewers attempt to understand and interpret what the interviewees are trying to say. It is very common that interviewers summarize a narrative or description and ask the participant for verification or further reflections. This was the fourth element in the conversational flow illustrated in Box 1.1 in the previous chapter. Doing this is, in a rather simple way, already beginning to analyze the statements by trying to achieve a form of interviewee validation *in situ*.

Also, the process of transcribing the recorded conversations should be thought of as part of the analysis. Transcribing necessarily means translating from one medium (the spoken word) to another (the written word), and researchers should think about how they are going to transcribe early on in the process. Many different approaches to transcription exist. These include very detailed conversation analytic approaches such as Gail Jefferson's, which demands the marking of overlap between speakers, emphasis, volume, delay, and so on, and which is very time-consuming; verbatim transcriptions that may include laughter, hmms, and breaks; and reconstructive transcriptions that "polish" and provide order to the often messy utterances of the speakers. There is no golden standard of transcription. Everything depends on the purpose of one's investigation and on what is possible in practice (what resources in terms of time or salary for assistants are available). But it is obvious that if one's analysis concerns the fine machinery of turn-taking, or how the form of speech shapes the meaning of what is said, then there is a need to transcribe the finer details of talk, whereas a more rough transcription might be in order if the purpose is to study the life stories of the participants. In any case, to transcribe is always to analyze in the original sense of analysis (literally "to break down into units").

Not all researchers transcribe the entire empirical corpus. Some prefer to work directly with the sound recording, which can be coded in most contemporary software programs for qualitative analysis, and some transcribe only selected portions of the corpus. After transcription, a more focused analysis of the material can be carried out, and here the options are legion and depend on the philosophical and theoretical position of the researcher and obviously also on the purpose of the study. Again, we may use the distinction between inductive, deductive, and abductive strategies to describe three broad approaches to analysis:

Induction in its different varieties is the most widespread approach to analysis. Some qualitative researchers talk about analysis as "analytic induction," which, in the broadest sense, refers to "the systematic examination of similarities within and across cases to develop concepts, ideas, or theories." (Pascale, 2011, p. 53). Analysts using this strategy will inductively code data to identify patterns and formulate potential explanations of these patterns. So, a key component of analytic induction is coding. Coding can be either concept-driven or data-driven. Concept-driven coding uses codes that have been developed in advance by the researcher, either by looking at selected portions of the material or by consulting the existing literature. Data-driven coding implies that the researcher starts out without codes, and develops them upon reading the material. In principle, anything can be coded depending on the research interest. Gibbs (2007) suggests the following examples: particular acts, events, activities, strategies, states, meanings, norms, symbols, level of participation, relationships, conditions or constraints, consequences, settings. Also reflexive codings can be used that record the researcher's role in the process (pp. 47–48).

Coding also plays a significant role in the inductive methodology known as *grounded theory*, originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Grounded theory is an inductive strategy for theory development without a prior theoretical framework. Many grounded theorists work with open coding in a process of "breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 61). Grounded theories are developed through the use of conceptualization to bind facts together, rather than through inferences and deductive hypothesis testing. Since the creation of grounded theory in the 1960s, it has branched in many

different directions, including the more constructivist position represented by Charmaz (2011) and the postmodern variant known as situational analysis, developed by Clarke (2005). Charmaz makes clear that grounded theory is inductive at its core and will proceed with analysis by comparing data with data (developing codes), comparing data and codes (developing tentative categories), and developing categories into overarching concepts that are compared with (other) theoretical concepts. These are, roughly, the analytic stages recommended in grounded theory. But Charmaz notes that grounded theory also has an *abductive* component since it highlights the importance of being *surprised* in the development of codes, categories, and theoretical concepts. So, as always in qualitative inquiry, it can be fruitful to mix the different analytic strategies.

A final example of an inductive approach to analysis is empirical phenomenology, which may serve as an example of *experience-focused analysis*, because of its ambition to study the essential structures of conscious experience. Phenomenology sometimes applies inductive analysis as a kind of *meaning condensation* (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008, p. 205). This refers to an abridgement of the meanings articulated by the research participants into briefer formulations. Longer utterances are condensed into shorter statements in which the main sense of what is said is rephrased in a few words. This technique rests on the idea in phenomenology that there is a certain essential structure to the way we experience things in the life world (see the previous chapter), which is what constitutes an experience *as* an experience of a given something (shame, anxiety, love, learning something new etc.).

An even more specific approach to phenomenological analysis has been developed in a psychological context by Amedeo Giorgi (e.g. Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). Giorgi breaks the analytic process down into four steps: (1) Obtain a concrete description of a phenomenon (through an interview) as lived through by someone. Read the description carefully and become familiar with it to get a sense of the whole. (2) Establish meaning units in the description. (3) Transform each meaning unit into expressions that communicate the psychological sense of the data. (4) Based upon the transformed meaning units, articulate the general structure of the experience of the phenomenon (p. 170).

While grounded theory is an analytic technique that is relatively independent of specific theoretical perspectives on human

life and experience, phenomenology is in a way a complete package of theory, philosophy of science, and methodology (see e.g. Langdridge, 2007). The advantage of using such a "package" is that peers will know what to expect from an analysis since there is much agreement concerning which questions to pose in an analysis as a researcher (and *to* the analysis, if one is the reader of it). The disadvantage is the rather constricted and standardized format, which may limit the creative development of qualitative analyses. Today, many qualitative researchers prefer to move freely between different methods of analysis. This, however, usually demands a more careful description of their analytic procedures so that readers have a chance to evaluate the validity of the possible idiosyncratic work.

Deduction in the analytic phase can involve the use of hypotheses derived from theory in an interpretive process. In Box 2.1, we shall soon see an example of how hypotheses can also be derived from the empirical material itself and tested in a comparative analysis. Herbert Blumer once referred to theoretical concepts as *sensitizing instruments* that researchers use as tools to be able to look in fruitful directions and helpful ways (see Clarke, 2005, p. 28). Some qualitative researchers, e.g. those working on the basis of philosophical hermeneutics (Gadamer, 1960), believe that we cannot understand anything without prejudices in the literal sense of pre-judgments. There is no such thing as understanding something from nowhere, without presuppositions, for we always need some interpretive framework in order to distinguish significant from insignificant aspects of the material. Some of these frameworks can be formulated explicitly as theories. Psychoanalysis is one such famous theory that enabled its practitioners and theorists to see and understand something that was not visible without the sensitizing concepts of psychoanalysis (e.g. repression, defense mechanisms, Oedipus complex, etc.). On a less paradigmatic level, many researchers today approach their empirical material analytically with theoretical concepts drawn from narrative theory (e.g. story line, plot, protagonist, antagonist, etc.). In both cases, it is possible to deduce hypotheses from general theories that can assist in the analytic process of reading and interpreting the data.

This kind of deductive analytic strategy is very often criticized for its confirmation bias, which I also discussed above. Critics argue

that analysts will find whatever the theory posits. This, however, is hardly an issue that is unique to qualitative research, but can be said to be a universal human tendency. Fortunately, a number of strategies exist to counter this tendency, e.g. to play the devil's advocate against one's own interpretations. If this is done sincerely, rather than just as window-dressing, it can lead to new and exciting perspectives on the materials. Flyvbjerg (2006) cites a number of social scientists who have argued that qualitative case studies may often lead to a refining of preexisting theory or even to discarding general theories that turn out not to hold when confronted with empirical realities. Flyvbjerg refers to this as case studies functioning like "black swans," borrowing the well-known example from logic that general statements (such as "all swans are white") can be falsified just by finding a single instance that contradicts them (e.g. by finding a species of black swans in Australia). If the analyst meticulously shows the reader that care has been taken to avoid confirmation bias, then the ensuing text may become very persuasive, and it often results in a highly readable product if the researcher constructs the text like a series of challenges to her own interpretations that are discussed in turn. A further sign of quality is seen when researchers present several different interpretations of the phenomenon under scrutiny rather than just sticking to a single one. This can be achieved by working with more than one theoretical framework, leading to different sets of "sensitizing concepts" that may bring forth different aspects of the material in the analytic process.

Abduction in the analytic phase works from breakdowns in the understanding of the analyst. The researcher will look for breaks and contradictions and other matters that somehow "disturb" the common understanding or convention. Some interview researchers, who work abductively in a broad sense, look in particular at the social practice of interviewing itself as the key to open up for analysis. Roulston (2011) has argued that there is much to learn from "failed" interviews, i.e., from interviews where things "go wrong" according to textbooks on interviewing and conventional wisdom. In Table 1.1 from the previous chapter, which drew a distinction between two conceptions of interviewing—as a research instrument and as a social practice—we can say that Roulston encourages interviewers to pay close attention to the nature of the conversational interaction itself and to look for misunderstandings or other breaks in

the conversational flow. Aspects that stand out as strange may often prove to be valuable to understanding how talking about the subject matter in a specific way constructs what we may know about it.

As one example of this, we may mention Tanggaard (2007), who did a research project on learning in a vocational school and conducted many interviews with students. The researcher conceived of learning as embedded in everyday activities, whereas it was made clear from interviews with vocational students that learning—according to the learners' perspective—was something that took place in a school. According to Tanggaard, this led to "discourses crossing swords" in the interviews, implying a struggle about how to define learning. The interviews did not appear as smooth and responsive, but rather as full of breaks, misunderstandings, and even antagonisms. This was made clear to Tanggaard only upon reading the transcripts and employing what I here have called abductive reasoning. It was her readings of Foucault's theory in particular that enabled the articulation of ideas about how to make sense of the struggle of the conversationalists. In her study, the opposition between the speakers—interviewer and interviewee—made it clear that "learning" is not a simple thing, but is a multi-perspectival phenomenon. The "what" of the conversation (the subject matter) cannot here be separated from the "how" of the situated interaction of interviewing.

Thus, unlike analytic induction, thematic analysis, grounded theory, and phenomenology—all of which aim to capture the lived experience as reported in interviews—analyses that look at interviews from an abductive angle in this sense will more often be discourse-focused and will treat interview data as topics (rather than resources) and analyze them as accounts occasioned by the situation (rather than reports about past experience). Needless to say, it is often helpful for readers of interview reports to learn how the analysts have treated the data in the process of analysis: as accounts, as reports, or both.

Reporting

The final step of an interview project is the reporting of the results. Like with the other steps, reporting cannot be treated as a discrete stage, but is in its own way important throughout the process. Ideally, interviewers should proceed with preparations, interviews, and analyses with the final end product—the

report—in mind. For qualitative research, it is the case that analysis and reporting in particular often melt together. Writing is "a method of inquiry" (Richardson & St.Pierre, 2005) throughout an interview study. Writing is a central way for qualitative researchers not just to report some findings, in the final instance, but also to experiment with analyses, compare different perspectives on the empirical material, and try out a number of alternative ways of presenting readings of the material. Writing should therefore be treated as an intrinsic part of the methodology of interview research and not as a final "postscript" added on at the end.

Since reporting is treated in great detail in the following chapters on writing up the methods section and writing up the research findings, I shall leave it here and encourage the reader to continue reading! The most important thing to bear in mind in relation to design questions is that the well designed project reflects on how to report at the outset. If the goal is to write a single short article, care should be taken not to obtain too much material to analyze, but if the goal is to write a long and thorough book, matters are very different. One should never ignore such practicalities, since the form of a good report supports the content of what the researcher is trying to say.

Designing for Discovering, Constructing or Understanding?

The four stages of *preparation*, *interviewing*, *analysis*, and *reporting* are characteristic of most interview projects across subject matters and theoretical paradigms. The underlying goals and research interests of different projects may, however, be quite different. I shall here reduce the many possible research interests to just three and provide an example of each. I will invoke a distinction, which initially looks rather abstract and philosophical, but which may have quite concrete implications for the research process. For although there is no direct coupling between kinds of design on the one hand and research interests on the other, it is often the case that tight, preset designs are meant to maximize the chances for the researcher *discovering* hitherto unknown features of reality, whereas more flexible designs are meant to facilitate the researcher's better *understanding* of something. In addition, it is also possible to design in a way that involves *constructing* some-

thing new. In short, qualitative interview researchers should know (and communicate to their readers) whether they are trying to:

- *Discover* something that they do not know.
- *Construct* something that they (or their requestors) would like to see happen.
- *Understand* something that they do not understand.

Concerning the relation between research design and research interest, we may refer to the great hermeneutic philosopher Gadamer (1960), who argued that the process of understanding something cannot be codified into methodological rules to be specified prior to the research process. In order to make sense of Gadamer's argument, you may ask yourself the following: What methods do you use when reading, and hopefully understanding, this book? What methods do you use when you try to understand the people you meet and talk to? In general, according to hermeneutic scholars, we do *not* employ methods in such cases, and it is misguided when some qualitative methodologists pretend that certain methodological procedures will guarantee good and insightful research by themselves. What we do in order to understand people (a primary aim for qualitative researchers) is spend time with them and talk to them. So, from a hermeneutic angle, it will sometimes be the case that a strict design, based on formal and standardized methodological rules, will not be helpful when understanding is the aim. This, however, should not lead us to discard design questions. Hermeneutically oriented inter-view research is also designed (albeit not necessarily in a methodo-logically strict manner), and hermeneutic interviewers, inspired by Gadamer, should nonetheless think through the steps of an inter-view project as outlined above.

In a recent book, Martin Hammersley (2011) discusses the three different models of research: The discovery model, the con-struction model, and the hermeneutic or understanding model. They correspond to three different research interests. The discov-ery model is probably closest to people's intuitive ideas about sci-entific research: Its rationale is to discover something new; just as physiologists have discovered the functions of organs and astrono-mers have discovered new planets and stars. In 20th century phi-losophy of science, however, the discovery model gradually fell out of fashion, because arguments were voiced (e.g. from the afore-mentioned Gadamer) to the effect that human and social science

phenomena are not independent of researchers in a straightforward manner. What we "see," in qualitative research, are historical and cultural phenomena (e.g. patterns of feeling, thinking, talking, and acting) that are constituted by human activities (discourses, symbolic interactions, etc.), including the very activity of gaining knowledge about them. So, the argument went, it is misleading to say that we "discover" them, for we always already have some kind of implicit knowledge about them.

Even in light of such arguments, I believe that it is premature to discard the discovery model. Even if there are valid philosophical reasons to claim that the phenomena studied by qualitative researchers are not independent of human activity (a claim I agree with), I still believe that it makes sense to say—in a more everyday sense of the term—that researchers can discover aspects of these phenomena. They can, as Noblit and Hare (1988) once expressed it, "make the obvious obvious" for us, and thereby discover something that might have been there all along in our lives, but remained unnoticed, perhaps due to its very pervasiveness. I have argued elsewhere (Brinkmann, 2012a) that phenomenological approaches are particularly adept at making the obvious obvious, and Iris Marion Young's paper "Throwing like a girl" is one of my favorite examples of what wonderful and enlightening descriptions of the mundane may result from using this strategy (Young, 1980). In the paper, Young shows how boys and girls learn to move their bodies in quite different ways, which cannot be accounted for in terms of anatomical differences, but concerns socialization. When reading her analysis, one is likely to react with a feeling of recognition; she describes something we knew all along, but which we did not know *that* we knew!

For interview projects that aim for discovery, it is very important to design the study in a way that allows the phenomena to appear in a way that is not controlled by, or a simple artifact of, the researcher's actions. To paraphrase the words of sociologist of science, Bruno Latour (2000), one must make sure to "allow the objects to object" to what researchers say about them and do to them. Only in that way can we attain a level of objectivity that allows for genuine discoveries. In other words, one must discipline the researcher's activities, and this is done most directly by methodology that may make the research procedures more transparent to readers. Below, in Box 2.1, I shall present an example of an interview study that discovered something new about the human world, which was facilitated by a careful methodological design.

Box 2.1 **Discovery Through Qualitative Interviewing**

When preparing and researching for this book, I sent e-mails to leading scholars in the field of qualitative interviewing, asking for exemplars of excellent interview projects and publications. In her kind reply, Janice Morse directed my attention to a study of burn patients who had experienced agonizing injuries (Morse & Mitcham, 1998). Morse is the founder of the International Institute for Qualitative Methodology at the University of Alberta, which is a leading qualitative research institution in North America, and she has also founded the journals *Qualitative Health Research* and the *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. She has thus been a very central figure in qualitative research for decades, in particular qualitative health research, and is extremely experienced as reviewer, editor, and author of papers based on qualitative interviewing.

The study was done by Morse herself together with a colleague, and in her e-mail she explains why she believes it is important. She describes an interesting process of analyzing the data that eventually led to the published paper. In the process, she almost stumbled upon the key to unlock the structure of the data and thereby of the phenomenon: "While analyzing I walked away from my computer, and when I came back I glanced at the screen and had a wow moment suddenly noticing how disjointed the text was. Everyday language took on a new meaning." (E-mail, August 30, 2011). "The text," referred to by Morse, is the textual material from the participants' statements. She continues: "I worked from this single observation to other data sets, 'testing hypotheses' with the already collected data. The moral of this story is that when you hear the interview in the interview setting, that is one level of analysis. Another may unfold when you work with the text."

The study illustrates that qualitative interviewing can lead to genuine *discoveries*. In this case, the discovery was about the language use of patients with catastrophic burn injuries. The primary research question concerned how such patients "get through" the experience and cope with "resulting disabilities, losses of body integrity, alterations in their former sense of self, and often the death of other family members involved in the same accident." (Morse & Mitcham, 1998, p. 667).

One aspect of coping with the agonizing physical pain identified in the literature is *disembodiment*, a distinct distancing from one's own body. And, as Morse recounts, when analyzing the interview statements of the patients, she discovered that they regularly referred to parts of themselves as objects, using "it," "the," and "this" (e.g. talking about "the left hand" rather than "my left hand"). In order to interpret this peculiar use of language, which she had not been aware of in the course of interviewing the participants, but only noticed as in a flash on the computer screen, the researchers compared the language use of burn patients with that of patients with experiences of pain that stem from other kinds of injuries (e.g., spinal cord injuries). They found that other groups of patients (which would be called "control groups" in quantitative research designs) use disembodying language to a much lesser extent, if at all.

Methodologically, the interviewers used narrative analysis of relatively unstructured, but focused, interviews to identify the phenomenon. Initially, Morse took a phenomenological attitude and displayed an interest in just letting the patients "tell their stories" (Morse & Mitcham, 1998, p. 668). But, in a subsequent analytic stage, and upon discovering the particular use of disembodying language, she went beyond phenomenological description to develop hypotheses (or "conjectures," as they are called in the paper), based on the patient narratives, to account for their language use. This represents a deductive phase in the research process, leading to five different hypotheses (ranging from disembodiment being caused by loss of sensation, by loss of physical ability, as something learned from physicians, as a means to protect the self, and finally as a means of controlling overwhelming pain). Out of the five different hypotheses, the researchers found evidence only for the fifth and final one: Disembodiment is a strategy used to remove the body part in order to remove the pain, when it is overwhelming (p. 671). Furthermore, the researchers found that later in the patients' rehabilitation period, patients again go back to using possessive pronouns when referring to the self.

Unlike many other interview studies that claim to have identified some novel phenomenon, the researchers in this case distinguish themselves by also looking at negative cases, i.e. examples of interviews when patients do *not* use disembodying language. This definitely adds to the credibility of the findings, since one

gets a sense of researcher trustworthiness as a reader, and, as the researchers explain, there is no reason to think that a negative case invalidates a more general observation (Morse & Mitcham, 1998, p. 670).

All in all, we can say that the study conducted and reported by Morse and Mitcham was designed in a way that enabled a genuine *discovery*. There is generally no formula for how to discover something new, and, as Morse recounts in her e-mail, it simply struck her when looking at the computer screen that there was something peculiar about the interviewee's statements. Unlike other designs that aim to construct a new kind of process, or understand something that one has already identified, this study shows that qualitative interviewing can lead to discoveries, even if the number of participants included is relatively small (initially, six patients with burn injuries were interviewed). The study further illustrates that it is possible, and in this case desirable, to work with a form of deduction in the analytic stage, i.e. qualitative "hypothesis testing." Conjectures about how to explain the phenomenon were deduced from the material and tested in a process that involved comparisons with the experiences and language use of other relevant patient groups.

The next models of research discussed by Hammersley are the construction and understanding models. In a practical down-to-earth sense, the construction model builds on the idea that the goal of qualitative research often is to create something new, e.g. a new or improved social practice, or even new kinds of people who have changed and developed as a consequence of taking part in a qualitative study. In Chapter 1, this was presented as the transformative model of interviewing. Qualitative interviewers are increasingly becoming aware that interviewing, as Briggs (2003, p. 497) has argued, is "a 'technology' that invents both notions of individual subjectivities and collective social and political patterns." Different conversational practices, including research interviews, produce and activate different forms of subjectivity, and, utilizing some of the more activist forms of interviewing discussed in the previous chapter, one goal of interviewing can be to construct subjects in ways that allow for new kinds of action.

In a more abstract epistemological sense, the construction model is in many ways a direct answer to the perceived problems of the discovery model. Scholars subscribing to the construction model (e.g. Gergen, 2001, and other so-called social constructionists) argue that knowledge is always constructed rather than discovered, and that we can never know what or how things are in separation from human activities. There are no "things in themselves," but only "things constructed by us." In its strong form, as Hammersley critically points out, social constructionism seems to undermine the very possibility of knowledge, because the only conception of knowledge available (to strong constructionists) is one that presents knowledge as what most people believe. This conflates knowledge and belief, and ignores the everyday necessity of distinguishing between what *is* true and what it *taken* to be true (Hammersley, 2011, p. 131). It also leads to the unhappy consequence that a powerful group of people can create truths by persuading or forcing others to believe certain things that are in the interest of the powerful group. Furthermore, in its strong form, constructionism leads to the consequence that most questions about research design can be ignored, because all knowledge is seen as a unique function of the steps taken to obtain it. In its weaker forms, the construction model fades into the understanding model, albeit with a greater emphasis on the fact that qualitative inquiry is meant to change aspects of the social world. An example of this is given below in Box 2.2.

Box 2.2   **Constructing Through Qualitative Interviewing**

One of the interview studies that I keep returning to is the classic reported in *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* by sociologists Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1985). The empirical material for this study of North American character and values consisted of interviews with more than 200 participants, some of whom were interviewed more than once. In an insightful appendix to the book, the authors present their philosophy of science as "social science as public philosophy." They reject the common view of the social science as "a disembodied cognitive enterprise" (p. 301), and advocate instead a dialogical role of the social sciences in which research functions to raise

important questions about values for society. In this way, the book aimed not simply to represent aspects of US culture to its readers, but to construct a discussion about where the United States are going as a society.

In order to achieve this, the researchers conducted a special kind of interview, which they refer to as "active interviews" (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler & Tipton, 1985). Active interviews correspond quite closely to the Socratic interviews that I introduced earlier in this book (see the previous chapter). In contrast to the interviewer as a friend or therapist, probing deep in the private psyche of the interviewee, the active interviews were intended to generate public conversation about societal values and goals. Such active interviews did not necessarily aim for agreement between interviewer and interviewee, and the interviewer was allowed to question and challenge what the interviewee said. In one of the examples cited, the interviewer, Ann Swidler, was trying to get the respondent to clarify the basis of his moral judgments crystallized in his statement that "lying is one of the things I want to regulate"—and Swidler asked him why:

A: Well, it's a kind of thing that is a habit you get into. Kind of self-perpetuating. It's like digging a hole. You just keep digging and digging.

Q: So why is it wrong?

A: Why is integrity important and lying bad? I don't know. It just is. It's just so basic. I don't want to be bothered with challenging that. It's part of me. I don't know where it came from, but it's very important.

Q: When you think about what's right and what's wrong, are things bad because they are bad for people, or are they right and wrong in themselves, and if so how do you know?

A: Well some things are bad because... I guess I feel like everybody on this planet is entitled to have a little bit of space, and things that detract from other people's space are kind of bad... (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler & Tipton, 1985, pp. 304–305)

Swidler challenges the respondent to examine why lying is wrong, which is quite a hard philosophical question, and the final question cited—concerning why wrong things are wrong—seems very complex, and in standard textbooks on interviewing, the question

could appear as an example of how *not* to pose an interview question. The question is (extremely) abstract and invites high conceptual reflection rather than concrete description. It very much resembles Socrates' questions in Plato's dialogues.

The methodological appendix can be read as a very honest and straightforward account of how a qualitative research group has worked. There are no details about the specific analytical steps, but a rich description of the discussions that the researchers had, how they interviewed, and the kinds of philosophical literature that inspired them. This is quite typical of studies that are designed to construct a discussion, in this case of the question that is the opening sentence of the book, "How ought we to live?" (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler & Tipton, 1985, p. vii).

The study by Bellah and co-workers does not represent a strong form of social constructionism, but rather a view of social inquiry as already a part of the society it studies. There is no place outside society from which to obtain an objective view of social processes, so qualitative social science must instead seek to construct a better social world by initiating discussions about society and its problems. Bellah's study also has great affinities with what Hammersley calls the understanding model (which is actually the one favored by Hammersley himself), and this is what I will focus on now.

The understanding model agrees with the critics of the discovery model that there is no knowledge whose validity is simply given (Hammersley, 2011, p. 132). But it simultaneously goes against the radical constructionist conclusion that this implies that knowledge can be constructed freely by human beings. We are constrained, as Gadamer would say, by the historical horizon of our interpretations, by the inescapable framework provided by culture and history that constitutes our world. We understand reality from where we stand, but there are still more and less accurate, fruitful, and, valid ways of understanding from where we are. So, in that sense, the understanding model assumes that knowledge can be both perspectival and objective at the same time, and it also implies that we cannot freely choose where to stand. We are situated somewhere in the conversational world (cf. Chapter 1), and that should not be seen as a hindrance to objective knowledge, but as a precondition of it.

When working from the understanding model, qualitative interviewers must design their research projects in a way that enables what Gadamer called a "fusion of horizons" that leads neither to a forgetting of one's own perspective, nor to totalizing the other that one seeks to understand. As the moral philosopher and phenomenologist Lévinas would say, the goal, which is at once ethical and epistemological, is to avoid the main ill of Western philosophy, viz. the reduction of the other to the same (Levinas, 1969). One should respect, and perhaps even celebrate, difference, and yet try to understand it. Interviewers, who use conversations to understand the lives of others, must therefore reflect upon how their own background (standpoints, methodologies etc.) affects their understanding, but they should not say (like some constructionists) that this background *determines* what they see.

Before summing up and concluding on design issues in qualitative interviewing, I shall present an interview study that is quite different from the ones presented in Box 2.1 and Box 2.2, and which rested on a different kind of design. Although not articulated in exactly these terms, the example presented in Box 2.3 is of an interview study which, I believe, nicely illustrates a kind of fusion of horizons, which was enabled by a very flexible design.

Box 2.3 **Understanding Through Qualitative Interviewing**
....

My attention was directed to the study described here by Martin Packer, author of *The Science of Qualitative Research* (Packer, 2011) and editor of the journal *Qualitative Research in Psychology,* when I asked him about examples of excellent interview studies. Packer gave the following kind answer in an e-mail:

"I have not been looking out especially for good examples of research interviewing, but one example that comes to mind is Loïc Wacquant's article "The pugilistic point of view: How boxers think and feel about their trade" (Wacquant, 1995). This is part of a larger study, and Wacquant has published almost a dozen articles and a book. But this one focuses on his interviews with boxers. I think there are some contradictions in it (for example, I don't believe that the boxers forgot

he was a teacher), but he manages to convince me that he is reconstructing an embedded and embodied form of understanding." (E-mail, August 18, 2011).

Upon reading Wacquant's analysis, I must agree with Packer's verdict. The article indeed communicates an embedded and embodied form of understanding. It does not, perhaps, report on any new *discoveries*, nor was the study conducted to *construct* changes in specific social practices, but it nicely illustrates how qualitative interviewing can be designed for *understanding* and why this may be a valuable thing to aim for.

Wacquant is a sociologist, born in France, who is working at the University of Califonia, Berkeley. He collaborated closely with the famous sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, and is an editor and co-founder of the journal *Ethnography*. In his article here, he describes and reconstructs the boxer's point of view (which he calls the pugilistic point of view, referring to boxing as pugilism). From August 1988 until October 1991, Wacquant conducted participant observation at a boxing gym in Chicago (on its South Side). He was here educated in the art of boxing, and his career as a boxer culminated with a fight at Chicago's Golden Gloves tournament (which, alas, he lost).

Like Bourdieu, Wacquant wishes to develop a "carnal sociology" that is not just a sociology of talking or observing selves, but one that involves embodied people, situated in social practices. Understanding the lives of people, from this "carnal" point of view implies living a life that approximates that of the people one wants to understand. In relation to interviewing boxers, it involves "taking seriously what ordinary boxers have to say about their occupation: how they think and feel about this harsh trade to which they are willing to give so much, what virtues it holds for them, and how it affects their life and self." (Wacquant, 1995, p. 490). Wacquant thus acts as a qualitative interviewer as an inherent aspect of learning the craft of boxing and talking to his fellow apprentices. He wants to obtain a view at prizefighting from the "inside looking out" (p. 490).

In the paper, Wacquant draws upon in-depth semi-structured interviews with 50 fighters, comprising, he says, almost all professional fighters in Illinois in 1991, and, in the course of the research process, he ended up with 2,000 pages of transcriptions (Wacquant, 1995, p. 493). Because he had been in the community for almost three years before the formal interviews were

conducted, he was able to "phrase [his] questions in a manner congruent with their occupational concerns and thus elicit candid and meaningful answers" (p. 490). Unlike the majority of today's interview studies, which involve participants with whom the interviewer just meets for an hour or so, Wacquant had prepared extremely well by spending numerous hours, weeks, and even years with the participants. So the interviews "were not the product of a fleeting and superficial encounter but one link in an extended chain of routine interpersonal exchanges." (p. 494).

Wacquant's article is full of detailed analyses of boxers, their lives and practice, and is informed by an understanding of the social situation of the boxers, most of whom "reside in segregated and degraded neighborhoods where violent crime is a basic fact of everyday life and where physical insecurity infests all spheres of existence." (Wacquant, 1995, p. 497). There is thus a combination of a macrosociological angle and minute analyses of the skilled bodily trade of boxing—the *kinetic technique* as he calls it (p. 504)—and there is first and foremost an acknowledgement of and respect for the fact that boxing can infuse the lives of boxers "with a sense of value, excitement, and accomplishment." (p. 501). As one of the boxers, Henri (a black light-heavyweight) said: "It's a *thinkin' man's game*, but the outside doesn't see that. The on'y thin' they see is jus' two guys throwin' punches, you know. Well, uh, you gotta think about *what* you gonna do, *when* you gonna do it, and *how* you gonna do it. See, this is what you gotta think about." (p. 503).

Toward the end of the article, Wacquant expresses his writing ambition: to outline "a picture of the pugilistic planet as its main inhabitants see it, or like to imagine it." (Wacquant, 1995, p. 519). He admits that the account is rather one-sided in its emphasis on the virtues of prizefighting, but a certain ambivalence also creeps in, e.g. when the interviewee Danny talks about his attitude to his son's boxing: "No, no, *no fighter wants their son* [to box], I mean you could hear it, you hear it even in [Jack] Dempsey's age: you never want your son to fight—*that's the reason why you fight, so he won't be able to fight*… It's too hard, it's jus' too damn hard." (p. 523).

In concluding on Wacquant's study, we can say that his interviews with the boxers reported in this article and elsewhere were parts of a larger and longer-lasting ethnographic project of understanding the world of boxing from the inside. The project was

thus designed for understanding something that many people do not understand, and even look upon with contempt. Regardless of one's pre-understanding of boxing, I doubt that anyone can maintain a simplistic view of boxing after having read Wacquant's descriptions. He has used his conversations with the boxers, aided by his own life as an apprentice of the craft, to understand their world—and his paper communicates this understanding in an artful way to the readers.

With such an interview study, we are at the most flexible and iterative end of the design continuum. The point is not that this is a sloppy design, without prior specification of the number of interviewees and preparation of an interview guide, but rather that it is the most adequate kind of design when one is aiming at this form of understanding.

The philosophical remarks that I introduced above, about different models of qualitative research designs, should not be taken to imply that qualitative interviewers ought to become philosophers (although a dose of philosophical reflection would rarely hurt). However, it would be helpful if they lived up to a minimal philosophical requirement, viz. to think through and make explicit what kind of model (or combination of models) their design rests on. Only if researchers do so can others evaluate whether the study is theoretically coherent and designed in a way that makes its goal realistic. It is certainly possible to work eclectically and combine research tools from different models, but many interview studies simply proceed with what looks like a phenomenological design of the interviewing process (searching for essential structures of human experience), combined with an oath to the philosophy of social constructionism that denies reality to all essential structures of experience. This is unreflective and illegitimate (and contradictory) eclecticism that makes interpretations of the findings very difficult.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have introduced a number of theoretical distinctions that enable us to conceptualize different kinds of design. I introduced a generic step-wise model that is good to keep in mind when considering the design of qualitative interview studies,

involving the steps of preparation, interviewing, analysis, and reporting, and I outlined three broad aims for qualitative interviewing: Discovery, construction, and understanding. There are many questions about design that are common regardless of the aim of the research project—which I conceptualized as the *what*, the *why*, the *how*, the *who*, and the *how many*—but there are also some issues that relate more specifically to each of the three broad aims.

Researchers aiming for discovery need to design their project in such a way that they minimize the risk that what they discover is simply an artifact of the study itself. This can be achieved by thinking carefully about the way that the interviewing is conducted, including an awareness of possible effects of leading questions, and also by striving for high validity and reliability when transcribing, coding, and analyzing the materials.

Researchers aiming for construction need a particular ethical sensitivity about the way that they expect the world to change in response to their research endeavors. Not all interviewees have an interest in changing when taking part in a study, and not all communities have asked for social change. Furthermore, researchers need to account for why the research is of value when it is not primarily an epistemic affair, seeking truth or understanding.

Finally, researchers aiming for understanding, who often need to work with a more flexible design and to constantly accommodate to the vagaries of the field they are studying, need to think about how they can document the different twists and turns that their research project undergoes. If Gadamer is correct that understanding is non-methodical, then they cannot rely on methodological specifications but must find other, more descriptive ways, of capturing and justifying the knowledge-producing process.

I also introduced three models of reasoning in qualitative research, viz. induction, deduction, and abduction. Roughly, these models correspond to designs that are data-driven, theory-driven, and breakdown-driven (this will be explained more fully in the next chapter). I tried to show how these models may play a role when designing a qualitative interview project, and also that they have particular significance in the analytic phase of research. Three examples were brought in: Janice Morse's study of burn patients, Robert Bellah and colleagues' study of North American values, and Loïc Wacquant's study of boxers.