

The Qualitative Interview: Contemporary Success as Scientific Challenge?

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The Qualitative Interview has become the most frequently used qualitative research method to make sense of our lives. At the same time we observe two opposite trends. On the one hand, we observe a new wave of (conservative) evidence-based research and on the other hand, a stronger (modernist) focus on reflexivity and postmodernism. Both the conservative and the modernist arguments work in favour of the interview, but in opposite directions. Then, we also find those who rather focus on the theoretical concerns about the analytic status of interview data. In this perspective the worry is that the success of the interview method may undermine the quality of qualitative research.

This way we are left us with a paradox: the success of the interview method may pose a threat to the credibility of qualitative research and the risk of a “qualitative” backlash.

In this tutorial we will look upon the interview method, the history and the alternate pro- and con-arguments as seen from the array of contemporary approaches and paradigms in qualitative research. What are the conflicting arguments and what are the epistemological background leading to the contemporary conflict over this method? In what ways do these arguments pose a threat to the status and the quality of qualitative research? Are there any ways out?

The tutorial will offer a number of illustrations from both Western and non-Western research.

Relevant publications:

Books (look for both full chapters and chapter sections):

- 1) Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein (eds.) *Handbook of Interview Research. Context and Method*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- 2) Denzin, Norman K. and Yvonna S. Lincoln (eds.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Thousand Islands: Sage (or later versions).
- 3) Ryen, Anne (2008) *Doing Interviews in Social Research: A Practical Guide*. London: Sage (forthcoming).
- 4) Seale, Clive, Giampietro Gobo, Jaber F. Gubrium and David Silverman (eds.)(2004) *Qualitative Research Practice*, London: Sage.

Chapters/articles:

- 1) Atkinson, Paul, and David Silverman (1997) “Kundera`s Immortality: the interview society and the invention of the self”, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3(3):304-25.
- 2) Atkinson, Paul and Amanda Coffey (2002) “Revisiting the Relationship between Participant Observation and Interviewing”, in Jaber F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein (eds.) *Handbook of Interview Research. Context and Method*, pp.801-814. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- 3) Ryen Anne (2009) “Ethnography: Constitutive Practice and Research Ethics”, in Donna Mertens and Pauline Ginsberg (eds.) *Handbook of Research Ethics for the Social Sciences*, Newbury Park, CA: Sage (In print).
- 4) Ryen, Anne and David Silverman (2000) “Marking Culture: Culture as Category Work”, *Quality Inquiry* Vol.6, Number 1:107-128.

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