Becoming a qualitative researcher

alternatives to the sofa

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problemer, som opstår ved at anvende nære personlige relationer for forskningsformål. I bogen "Farligt feltarbejde – etik og etnografi i feltstudier" problematiserer Jacobsen og Kristiansen feltforskeres "under cover" feltarbejde, hvor der forestilles kammeratskab og solidaritet for at opnå viden om en gruppe. I bogen "Ethics in Qualitative Research" af Mauthner et al., påpeger en britisk gruppe feministiske forskere en kløft mellem almene etiske regler og de mange komplekse etiske afgørelser i den konkrete forskningspraksis, og diskuterer ud fra egne forskningsprojekter etiske dilemmaer ved at forestille sympati og venskab for at frembringe deres forskningsdata.

Den nye inderlighed og en instrumentalisering af den empatiske dialog kritiseres også i antologien "Pædagogikken og kampen om individet. Kritisk pædagogik, ny inderlighed og selvets teknikker" redigeret af John Krejsler. I bogens kapitler inddrages Foucault's analyser af selvets teknologier, Sennet' diskussion af intimitetstyranniet, og konsumerisme som forståelsesrammer for en tiltagende intimisering inden for den alternative pædagogik.

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Steinar Kvale

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Becoming a qualitative interviewer – alternatives to the sofa

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Introduction

The aim of this article is to contribute to a discussion about the training of the qualitative interviewer. I am particularly inspired by an argument for "Understanding of Self" as a necessary component of researcher training initiated in this latest newsletter (December, 2003) by Annelise Goldstein.

In the following I refer to Goldstein's position as an *individual, therapeutic approach* to the interviewer training. Goldstein argues that a non-reflected subjectivity of the researcher must be considered a personal bias doing qualitative interviews, and that clinical supervision, systematic self-study and personal therapy may control for the unconscious forces driving the research (Goldstein, 2003, p. 18). Elaborating on the idea of "Understanding of Self" as part of a interviewer training I will critically discuss in this article from *"a cultural and social setting approach"* to the qualitative interview how and when training may help the researcher to reflect on the relations in the qualitative interview. According to a cultural and social view of the qualitative interview the self of the interviewer is not to be considered a bias, but an epistemologically productive part of the interview as a particular discursive practice (Fontana & Frey, 2000, Tanggaard, 2003). From this viewpoint the training of the interviewer first and foremost has to aim at developing a critical reflection on the relations in the interview setting as a particular social and cultural situation. The above sketched contrast between an individual, therapeutic approach to a training of the qualitative interviewer and a cultural and social setting approach to this same training will be elaborated in the following.

What about the forgotten self of the interviewer?

In the psychological professions such as psychotherapy and counselling it is commonly acknowledged that the psychologist must receive some supervision and even clinical therapy

to be able to detect own biases and blind spots. The psychologist will thereby be better able to know her own perspective and care about and regulate his or her own influence on the work done with clients. This requirement for supervision and therapy is even formally included in the training to become an authorised psychologist in Denmark (www.pn.sm.dk). A qualitative interviewer may in some cases work intensively with and influence other people's understanding of their own lives, but she is not formally required to reflect and work on her relation to the informants and the research. Relying on the modernist conception of the researcher as a neutral tool for the collection of knowledge about the world the influence and consideration of the self of the interviewer is often forgotten.

In the following I trace the self of the researcher in the literature on the qualitative research and discuss the issue of why to care about the self in the qualitative interview. I take my point of departure in the individual therapeutic approach as advocated by Goldstein and elaborate on this position by referring to resent developments in the discursive and the anthropological qualitative research tradition.

The individual therapeutic approach to the self of the interviewer

Goldstein (2003) is in her argument for a focus on the researcher's self as part of interview training inspired by the psychoanalytic interview as mentioned by Kvale (2003). She argues that: *"Researchers' attention is sharply focused on the subject of the research (as it should be) but often to the extent of losing focus on the self"* (Goldstein, 2003. p. 14). Goldstein says that the researcher has effects on her subjects that are *"outside researcher control"* (Op. cit. p. 15). The researcher therefore has a *"responsibility to understand himself and how he potentially is impacted by forces outside his awareness"* (Op. cit.). Goldstein refers to these unconscious forces as a personal bias in the research process. They are the hidden aspects of personality that cannot be controlled for while on the other hand they are to be understood as aspects of the self.

From Goldstein's point of view an important component of the researcher training must be a scrutiny of the Self. *"The researcher must understand what he or she brings to the interview situation...and how his observations and interpretations are being influenced and how he impacts the interview interaction itself"* (Op. cit., p. 16). Goldstein advocates a view into the

psychoanalytical tradition for supervision and self-study as part of therapeutic interviewing and as an inspiration for the qualitative interview training. She discusses the use of clinical supervision, systematic self-study and collegial teamwork as concrete pathways to work on the "Understanding of Self" of the interviewer. Through a reflection of one's own subjectivity in relation to the subject of the research, (it may be aspects of anxiety or the history of one's relation to parents), the interviewer will be able to explicitly state personal experiences of possible relevance to the research that at the beginning of a study are often unavailable or inexplicable to her. Goldstein refers to Berg & Smith (1988) *"The self in Social Inquiry: Researching Methods"*, and she highlights their points on the dynamics of social science and the particular issue of humans investigating humans. Because of the particular human aspects of research in the social sciences and the potential influence from the researcher's self on the research, he must, as argued by Berg, confront *"personal weaknesses, unconscious conflicts, or current struggles in the development of his personality"* (Goldstein, 2003, p. 16).

As I read Goldstein's points of view, it seems that an "Understanding of Self" is mostly referred to as a reflection on the feelings, weaknesses and struggles of the individual self. At best these aspects of the self are confronted through clinical supervision, self-study or therapy before beginning or while doing the research. That is why I call this psychoanalytical position on the training of the qualitative interviewer the individual, therapeutic approach. While I do share Goldstein's concern on the possible, problematical aspects of a non-reflected subjectivity as a qualitative interviewer, I will not, to the same extent as Goldstein, privilege a self-study of personal feelings and weaknesses out of context referring to the self. Rather I will recommend, as argued in the following, a systematic reflection on the relations of self and the interview as it is lived, anchored and epistemologically productive in the ongoing research process. This does not exclude the relevance of, for example, supervision, but my argument is that a possible supervision must primarily refer to and reflect the professional practice of doing research and not exclusively the self of the interviewer.

The cultural and social setting approach to the training of the interviewer

As I have touched upon in the above, I am here discussing the training of the qualitative researcher with a view to the qualitative interview as 'a cultural and social setting' influencing and constituting both the self of the interviewer and the interviewed. My overall point is that

there is always something at play in the intricate points of contact and developing relations among the researcher's self and the research field or the respondents in an interview situation. This may not necessarily be a deep unconscious factor out of our control, but it may be the sheer fact that our former and actual lives in other times and places may influence the topic that is chosen for research, the way we carry on the research, and what we do not do or see. A researcher training that dares to focus on these relations may bring new light onto the actual and possible directions, gaps and conflicts in the research process.

In my conception of the interview as a cultural and social setting, I am inspired by the anthropological research tradition. The anthropological and the ethnographic research has been very focused on the effect and the influence from the researcher on the research (Van Maanen, 1988, Kleinman & Copp, 1993, Lave & Kvale, 1995, Lather & Smithies, 1997, Coffey, 1999, Hasse, 2002). This may be due to the obviously prolonged involvement of and possible change of the researcher in the culture of others. In contrast to this the literature on the qualitative interview research has been almost silent on the issue of the researcher's self in relation to the interview setting. As I went through the list of contents in the recognized *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) there is only one text discussing the researcher as a subject. This is a chapter referring to the ethnographic tradition for auto-ethnography, personal narrative and reflexivity with its emphasis on the researcher as an embodied, sexualised, emotional and particular being (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). In the following, I will therefore elaborate on the above mentioned discussion of the individual therapeutic approach to a reflected subjectivity by bringing it in line with recent discussions about the qualitative interview as a cultural setting constructing, negotiating, changing, and challenging the self of both the interviewer and the respondent (see also Allred & Gillies, 2003).

My question is not, as is the case for the individual, therapeutic approach, in particular how to control for the unconscious forces or biases that the researcher might bring to the interview setting. Instead I ask the question about how to systematically train for an awareness of and sensitivity to the interview as a cultural and social setting shaping, challenging, reproducing, maintaining, reconstructing, and representing our selves and the selves of others. While the individual therapeutic approach seems to care mostly for the personal development of the

researcher as a self, a cultural and social setting approach to the interview will argue for a training of the interviewer that enables discussions and reflections on the developing relations in the interview setting and their point of reference to other relevant relations and contexts. But let us first take a look at how the self of the interviewer is actually considered in some of the recent literature on the qualitative research.

The self in the literature on the qualitative interview

The self as researcher effect and influence

During recent years, the influence from the researcher's self on the interview research has been discussed under the names of researcher effect and influence. In particular, the discussion has focused on how to account for selective perceptions and biased interpretations. Kvale (1996) in his book on the qualitative research interview addresses criticisms of qualitative interview data as subjective. Kvale offers ways in which this can be addressed through an intensive training of the interviewer making them aware of their personal experience in the interaction. Furthermore, the researchers' perspective should be explicitly stated in the research report. As part of the research process, the researcher should play "devil's advocate to his own findings" (1996, p. 242). By this is meant a critical examination of the analysis and interpretations of the interview findings and a control for selective perceptions and biased interpretations.

Kvale does not argue for the effect and influence of the researcher to be avoided as in the early traditional objectivist and positivist programme of the qualitative research (criticised by Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 12). He rather acknowledges a reflected view onto the subjective aspect of the interview as a possible strength concerning the qualitative interview as a method aimed at acquiring a further knowledge of a socially constructed conversational reality. As argued by Lave in an interview with Kvale (Lave & Kvale, 1995) the experiences and researcher's life are the best suited instruments acquiring knowledge about a fundamentally social and cultural world.

Both Kvale and Lave argue for the qualitative research as a craft to be learned by doing, but none of them discusses in much detail how to work with the experience of being your own

best instrument. Lave would highlight the parallel lines of both her understanding of the subject matter of the research and her own developing relations to the field as part of extensive field-studies. By this is meant the ongoing reflection (anchored in the research process through for example the writing of personal diaries and theoretical readings) on the complex interplay of both her changing understanding in the field and the existing knowledge of the field of research (Personal communication, May 25th, 2004). Kvale, in particular, seems to weigh the discussion of methods for analysis and validation of the interview data.

The focus on analysis and validation, as advocated by Kvale, is very much in line with the latest discursive trend in the discussion of the qualitative interview, where the centre of attention is almost exclusively on the analytical techniques to make meaning out of the discourses produced through the qualitative interview. A focus is set on the developing discourses and the texts produced, and the researcher is recommended to alienate her self from every day assumptions by seeing the world through a 'strong' theoretical perspective (Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999, p. 33). In the particular discursive perspective as advocated by Jørgensen & Philips the researchers' self and its guiding assumptions are seen as a sort of a bias hindering a reflected view on the world. It is only through the choice of a particular theoretical perspective that the researcher can alienate her self from her immediate understanding of herself and her common sense approach to the world. It is though the considerate choice of the theories and methods of the research that the interviewer can ask truly reflected questions to the research. As to the discursive position the role and the common discourses of the researcher have to be reflected and also in particular the relations of power among the researcher and the informants (Op. cit., p. 121).

Although the self of the researcher is not discussed in much detail the discursive perspective on the qualitative interview and Lave's reflections on being her own best instrument do implicate a view onto the construction, the negotiation and the change of the researcher's self as part of those discourses that are at the same time the object of the research. It seems to be acknowledged that the researcher cannot work as a neutral instrument for the collection of data from the world, but that he or she is an implicated part of the discourses and the practices of the research. With the researcher being part of a particular discursive field she also has to consider her contribution to the discursive production of the world. Therefore on the one hand

the discourse perspective seems to abandon a focus on the self of both the interviewee and the researcher in favour of the analysis of discourses, while on the other hand it represents a critical inquiry into the question of the researcher being part of a discursive production of the world. But how is it that the researcher works with his or her self in the actual research and what about being your own best instrument?

Impression management or discursive analysis?

In Fontana & Frey's (2000) standard article on the qualitative interview the aspect of the researcher influence is mentioned mostly in respect to the questions of what Goffman (1959) initially called 'impression management' in the field. It concerns the deciding on how to present oneself, establish rapport, access the setting and gain trust of the informants. As argued by Coffey (1999, p. 3) in her book on the ethnographic self, the discussion of the personal and the emotional aspects of the qualitative research are often confined to particular aspects of the research process (such as the doing of rapport or the gaining of access to the field) rather than establishing them as pervasive to the whole enterprise. The self is very often only seen to be an instrument to facilitate good fieldwork relations, while an analytical discussion on how identities are constructed, reproduced, mediated, changed and challenged in the research process and setting often are missed. Furthermore the development of researcher roles is typically described in straightforward and unproblematic ways and often through a rosy picture of the successful researcher. The assumption seems to be that the researcher takes on a role to get on with the task at hand, while the complicated role juggling and negotiating involved in the field of research is seldom addressed (Coffey, 1999, p. 24).

It could be argued that the amount of role juggling may be more extensive doing ethnographic field studies for longer periods than it is the case with the qualitative interview conducted at confined places for a shorter amount of time. A counterargument to the consideration of care of the self as a superfluous matter in the interview research is that even shorter time encounters in the field of research do involve negotiations and change of the participation of the involved. Furthermore, the interview research is often conducted as part of broader participant observations or field studies. The interview may in that situation in itself reproduce, rebuild and be influenced by the existing relations of the researcher and the informants.

One particular example

In an article on the qualitative interview as discourses crossing swords I have tried to illustrate the possible consequences of a more or less non-reflected consideration of the role of myself in particular interview settings with apprentices in the electro-mechanical field (Tanggaard, 2003). In the particular interview settings I did not realize that I was somehow trying to impose my own perspective on learning as an all-pervasive phenomenon in the world onto the apprentices by asking them questions that endlessly involved the word of 'learning'. When I used the term 'learning' the apprentices often refused to be talking about learning. While I as a researcher was interested in learning, the apprentices were more interested in developing their identities with regard to their field and forthcoming jobs. In fact, one of the apprentices told me that one could learn too much (Op. cit., p. 25).

On the one hand it could be argued that I really got some useful information about learning being so naively concerned about it. On the other hand a more reflected consideration on my own roles in the interview setting could have given me even more vivid descriptions of learning. The apprentices just did not want to talk about learning through this particular term. Still, my somehow naive use of the term 'learning' was, in fact, epistemologically productive as it highlighted some of the apprentices' important conflicts in the world (and also concerning the use of the term learning in my own professional world!)

From the above examples it seems that the complicated role juggling in the interview setting did lead into a negotiation of the meaning of the term 'learning', but very often the subjective or emotional aspects of the research are considered issues to be acknowledged and if possible dealt with rather than seen as epistemologically productive in the research process. Still, as also argued by Fontana & Frey (2000, p. 663), the qualitative interview is increasingly seen as a negotiated accomplishment, a discursive or a linguistic event in which the meanings of questions and responses are contextually grounded and jointly constructed by the interviewer and the respondent. This places the co-construction and negotiations of meaning and the active and productive role of both the researcher and the respondents at the very heart of the qualitative interview. It may therefore seem to be the case that the discursive perspective on the qualitative interview in fact brings a reflection of the epistemologically productive role of the researcher into the central scenes of the research process. The self of the interviewer is not just to be dealt with through a reflection on personal weaknesses, struggles and feelings as it is argued in the individual therapeutic position on the training of the interviewer. Rather the self of the interviewer is co-constructed in the interview setting requiring a reflection as to how this setting is shaping the selves and the roles of both the interviewer and the interviewed.

Above I have sketched examples on the inclusion and discussion of the researcher's self from some of the literature on the qualitative interview. The subjective aspects of the qualitative interview are generally acknowledged, but the change or the challenge of the researcher's self as a productive part of the research is minimally discussed. In the following I will continue the discussion of the researcher's self by suggesting ways of training that may deepen the researcher's awareness of his or her own self as a not only biased, but also as a productive part of the research process. I will especially discuss the relevance and possible scenarios for supervision, collegial teamwork and the pro and cons of the confessional tale and the writing of the self in the research reports.

Scenarios for the training of the qualitative researcher

In the following reflections on scenarios for the training and the workings on the self of the qualitative interviewer are sketched. The discussion will take on a preliminary form and it remains for ideas to be worked out and evaluated in practice to be able to consider their ultimate usefulness.

When and what kinds of supervision?

I began this article by referring to Goldstein's point on the "Understanding of Self" as a required component in the training of the qualitative interviewer. Goldstein mentions different means to this end of "Understanding of Self". She talks about *"not to be taught but rather to embrace the task of learning it for ourselves and learning about ourselves in process"* (Goldstein, 2003, p. 19). At the same time she mentions "out of context activities" such as clinical supervision, where kinds of instruction or teaching may be implicated, as the way to embrace becoming an experienced researcher. Supervision is generally defined as a formalised guidance or counselling from a more experienced professional.

Supervision from more experienced interviewers could be of value to enhance the quality of ongoing studies. Supervision on the often, complex role-juggling in the interview setting or the developing aspects of the interviewer's own life in relation to the research could be much more integrated into the qualitative interview training of today as a formalized element of, for example, Ph.D.-studies. Supervision going into specific situations from the former, the actual or the coming research can be of value in this process. That means a supervision being anchored in the professional life of the researcher involving and often at the same time touching the subject matter of the research and the subjectivity and the life of the researcher.

Surely supervision may cultivate the novice interviewer's conception of the character of the interview situation. Situated as part of a research project in progress supervision may also prevent those typical errors often first recognized writing the final research report such as the over-identification with particular informant. Close supervision on for example the first interview by the novice interviewer could potentially aim at a deeper understanding of the relations of the social positions and the acquired identities as part of a particular interview setting. Still, the supervision has to focus on not just the biases, but also more firmly the productive aspects of these issues for the further research progress. The supervision could as an overall framing aim at developing the ability to engage in 'thick descriptions' of the relations of self and the interview setting and the capacity for a contextual judgement of the implications and consequences of the relation of self and the research field (See Brinkman & Kvale, in prep. for a discussion of contextually qualified description and judgement as an element of ethical qualitative interview research).

Research supervision can be of more or less use and value, and it may take on different forms concerning the particular topic of the research. The woman having herself suffered from breast-cancer and now wanting through qualitative interviews to investigate the experiences and meanings of other women living their lives with breast-cancer might need a considerable amount of supervision on her own life in relation to the research topic (See also Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Other topics of research may not immediately require a supervision going into the relations of one's own life and the research. The supervision can also at different points of the research concern either very intellectual or more emotional considerations and discussions. The traditional guidance from the experienced researcher as part of for example a

Ph.D. course might also take on a form, where aspects of the research related to for example the role juggling and the assumed identities of the interviewer in particular interview settings might be discussed. Still the use or the type of supervision always has to be judged in relation to particular situations of the research and the researcher. It would be of outmost importance that the supervision not just aims at the researcher developing a more or less isolated self or becoming self-reflective, but that it aims at a reflection of the sometimes both biased and productive role of the interviewer in interview situations.

The research team

Research is often a more or less collective enterprise facilitated through cooperation among researcher. Concerning the reflections on the self of the researcher colleagues in a research team may be a secure base investigating and discussing the research process and the analysis of data. Using the research team concerning these issues can go on at a daily basis, but it may also require a more formal organization, where a discussion of the interview settings as part of a particular research project is explicitly at the agenda. Still conflicts and destructive competition within the group may hinder a discussion on the difficult and emotional aspects of the interview setting. Nonetheless, as a site for cooperation, the research team may be a learning environment anchoring the reflections on the research process in the researcher's everyday life. The research team could also organize training sessions, maybe as part of teaching seminars, where the interviewer could try out his or her interview style and the interview could be recorded on video for further discussion and analysis.

Writing the self

Another way to secure the integrations of the reflections on the researcher's experience as a productive part of the interview is to train the researcher to write her self into the research report. Van Maanen (1988) has described how the qualitative field researcher could write a confessional tale in a highly personalized style from the field. This writing of the self into the research reports can certainly be one of the ways of demystifying the relations of self and the interview setting by showing through the confessional tale what one was actually and practically doing in the research process (see also Ellis & Bochner, 2000). A training concerning diverse writing styles may also possibly be a discussion ground for the role of the self in the research reports.

The researcher's confession may appear in a separate chapter or as a text elaborating on the more formal snippets of method description. Very often the tales show that the researcher does not in fact always herself choose nor control her roles and identities in the field, but rather learns to follow roles imposed by others in order to stay in the field (van Maanen, 1988, p. 78). This having to act in ways among others to be able to stay there and conduct our interviews is certainly not always controllable through one's own personal development attained in individual therapy. This may in fact first and foremost concern learning the culture of others and not focusing solely on one's self.

Still, as mentioned by Van Maanen, one problem is that the confessional tales usually end up on an upbeat, positive, if not fully self-congratulatory, note as if to say, well I made a lot of mistakes, but in the end I found a perfect match with the others (Op. cit., p. 79). Another problem is that it is only the confessions of the well-known authors that reach the publishing state, because there must be something of note to situate the confessions. While the novice researcher may have a lot to confess, his confession rarely finds an audience. Another problem is, as argued by Coffey (1999, p. 117) that the existing confessional tales often focus on the social side of research, but they seldom go into the particular personal aspects of the research. Exceptions from this is in my viewpoint Lather & Smithies' (1997) very personal reflections in separate texts in their book on the issue of working with women diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. Lather, for example, writes about her own experience of having to find out about her HIV status as part of her positioning in the study. She describes her waiting for the test results and wondering how much of her life would change, if she happened to be tested positive. After realizing that her test was negative, she felt on her own body the distance between being one of those who "helps" and someone who is in it. It made it clear to her that she and Smithies were non-HIV status women telling stories which were not their own. This realization became the emotional shape of their work and it was important in producing their relation to the research field and the problems of really figuring out what it was like living with HIV/AIDS (Op. cit. p. 30f).

Another example is Kondo (1990) and her vivid presentation of everyday life on the shop floor of a Tokyo factory. Kondo refers to the ways in which her fieldwork required the

acquisition of a different selfhood. Kondo, as a Japanese-American woman studying Japanese society was Japanese in appearance, but lacked the cultural competencies of a Japanese. How to act and behave and the nuances of interaction was learned by Kondo over the course of the fieldwork. My point is that both Smithies & Lather and Kondo writes the self into the research report, and they argue for the usefulness of these personal aspects as part of the production of knowledge in their research. Still, one may critically argue that this writing of the self into the research reports may become part of a naïve celebration of the self.

In recent years critique (LENE: af hvad?) from mainly within the qualitative interview tradition has developed. A critique says that stories produced through qualitative interviews, which are also used in the field-studies fictionalise life, and that they are therefore never more than just fiction depending on memory. This concerns a critique going into what kind of truth these stories aspire to. The other, and in my opinion more interesting critique, is that narrative reflects or advances a romantic construction of the self (Atkinson, 1987). If you are a storyteller rather than a story analyst (Op cit, p. 335) then your goal becomes therapeutic rather than analytic, says Atkinson. A critique of the qualitative interview as a means to persuade subjects to disclose their more private and 'genuine' thoughts is emphasized by Duncombe & Jessop (2003) and this could well implicate the confessional tale on behalf of the interviewer as well. It is certainly the case that a writing of the self into the report must not develop into a celebration of the researcher's self at the cost of loosing focus on the research theme. The goal of research is not the therapeutic investigation of the researcher's self, but a more visible researcher "I" may give the reader a better ground to evaluate the particular findings of the concrete research, and it can be a constructive part of the contextually grounding of the research process. Still, there is a considerable amount of discussion about the place and the relevance of these personal confessions in the research reports, but there is general agreement that it allows for a view of the author as a creative and productive part of the research (Coffey, 1999, p. 133).

Conclusion

In this article I have tried to elaborate on the discussion of the complex relations at play in the interview setting. I have also touched on aspects of a future training to work on these issues. Inspired by Goldstein's point (2003) on "Understanding the Self" as a component of

researcher training I have pointed to the possible dilemmas of a non-reflected subjectivity of the researcher although I left her individual, therapeutic approach to the interviewer training and argued for a view to the interview as "a cultural and social setting". While the individual, therapeutic position seems to privilege a training that aims at the individual self coming to an understanding of her own personal conflicts and weaknesses so as not to bias the interview, the cultural and social setting approach advocates that the training of the interviewer cultivates her view on the interview as a conversational, relational and negotiated process involving the lives of the participants in and across contexts.

As part of this article I have tried to trace the seemingly forgotten self in the literature on the qualitative interview. This investigation led to the conclusion that the recent discursive analysis approach does acknowledge that the interview (and the research) is influenced by the identities and the roles of the researcher. The anthropological perspective on for example the researcher as her own best instrument as highlighted by Lave and the writing of the self such as in the confessional tales also acknowledges that the life and the experiences of the researcher are a productive part of the research process. Still, very few, in my opinion with the exception of for example Lather & Smithies, discuss the change and the challenge that the researcher may experience through the research and the meaning of this for the positioning in the research process. A general tendency is also, as argued by Coffey (1999), that the self is seen to be a functionally important part only at certain crucial points of access to data in the research process. The self is mainly considered something that may bias the research process while I have argued for a critically reflected experience of the researcher to be a productive part of the research. An interviewer training that aims at developing the ability to critically work on the relations of interview setting and the complex lines of development of the understanding of the research field may enable a richer and profoundly more deep consideration of the research process. This kind of training must find its point of focus in the professional life of the interviewer and it can be organized in settings for supervision, collegial teamwork and through for example writing sessions aimed at developing the ability to discuss the particular social and cultural shaping of interview research.

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Life Changes among US Veterans in Thailand and Local Reactions – A Short Outline of a Qualitative Study

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Several years ago, I became interested in the topic of life changes brought about by emigrating to a foreign culture. This happened naturally as a result of my own emigration to Thailand and personal experiences following from this. The research project presented here is an ongoing project carried out in cooperation with members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Association in Udon Thani, Thailand. This group consists of some eighty American men who served in the US Air Force base in Udon Thani and other cities during the Vietnam War (1962 to 1973). The veterans chose to live on in Thailand after the Vietnam War was over, and selected Udon Thani City, where they had originally been stationed, as their future home. So far, thirty former US soldiers have been interviewed in connection with this project.

The aim of this study is to explore and describe how the experience of serving in the US Air Force in Thailand at that time influenced and changed the lives of the men involved. A secondary aim of the project is to discover and describe patterns in the reaction of the local Thai people to the presence of a military base with over five thousand foreign soldiers. The research method used is semi constructed qualitative interviews, analyzed, and interpreted in the hermeneutical tradition (Kvale, 1996; Palmer, 1969). Since this will be quite familiar to most readers of this newsletter, I will not go into the general method here.

Some preliminary findings of this study and reflections on methodology used will be described here. First, an explanation is needed for those not familiar with the scene of the research and the nature of the research topic. In 1962, the US became involved in the Vietnam War as a result of the Domino theory, adopted by the US Government and presidents Kennedy and Johnson. This theory stated that if one of the five South East Asian countries (Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Myanmar / Burma) became dominated by a communist regime, then the rest of the countries would also become communist. This was considered a serious threat by the US government. After France gave up defending their rule in their former colonies of Vietnam and Laos, the US stepped in with military force to fight the communist troops. Thailand was never directly involved in the Vietnam War but the US government sent thousands of troops and fighter and bomber airplanes to the country, which was used as a platform to bomb communist military bases in Vietnam and Laos.

Most of the US soldiers were young men, aged between eighteen and twenty-two when they arrived in the country. They had never been to Asia before and encountered a profound culture shock when they arrived. The study shows that most of them were single, had limited work experience and their formal education was limited to the high school or vocational college levels. They were not war-hardened soldiers in any sense but had, of course, undergone