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*Article*

## **Objections in Research Interviewing**

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### **Abstract**

In this article the author argues that research interviewing can be a form of research practice in which the subjects of study can object to the researcher's questions and the interview's theme. Researchers performing qualitative interviews should pay particular attention to situations where interviewees object to what we think, say, and write about them. The author draws on empirical examples where the objections and hesitations voiced by the interviewees toward the interviewer's questions became part of reconsidering the initial theoretical concepts guiding the research process. She argues that the interviewer should not provoke such situations but, rather, be sensitive enough to remain open to the possibility that the interviewee might feel a need to object to or refuse the researcher's interpretations. When this happens, it can allow for a fruitful exploration of the theme of conversation and the researcher's agenda.

**Keywords:** dialogue, objections, active research interviewing

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If social scientists wanted to become objective, they would have to find the very rare, costly, local, miraculous situations where they can render their subjects of study as much as possible able to object to what is said about them, to be as disobedient as possible to the protocol, and to be capable of raising their own questions in their own terms and not in those of the scientists whose interests they do not have to share.

—Bruno Latour, 2000, p. 116

## **Introduction**

The aim of this article is to argue in favor of research interviewing as a form of research practice in which the subjects of the study have the opportunity to object to the researcher's questions. I suggest that researchers performing qualitative interviews pay attention to the situations where interviewees object to what we think, say, and write about them. This idea is inspired by Latour (2000, 2004, 2005) and in particular his methodological emphasis on letting research participants raise objections to the researcher's agenda and research questions or both, which should then be reflected on when doing research in the social sciences. Basically, the aim of the present article is not to propose a new form of research interviewing but to underline the importance of being aware when we happen to be part of those situations where interviewees actually object to what we say about them and when they raise their own questions on their own terms during an interview. In the article I draw on a few empirical examples from various fields of research where the objections voiced by the interviewees came to be seen as valuable feedback and correction to the initial theoretical concepts guiding the research process. The first example is taken from published research on informal learning, whereas the last examples are from my research on vocational education and learning among educational psychologists. Furthermore, I discuss how interview research might pay more attention to interviewer-interviewee relationships and their contribution to the production of new knowledge.

## **Sources of inspiration**

Latour (1999) is known for his contribution to the field of science and technology studies (STS) and, among other things, for the study of the production of scientific facts in laboratories, which have also led to a perspective on how to do social science research called actor-network-theory (ANT) (Latour, 2005). Latour proposed that social science researchers describe the constant achievement or reassembling of the social rather than maintaining the idea that social ties, social factors, or social groups might in themselves explain what is social. He argued that to be objective, we should not muffle our informants' precise vocabulary into an all-purpose metalanguage but, rather, describe what people do and say. His point is, furthermore, that everyday life in laboratories, in schools, at home, or elsewhere is accomplished in complex networks or assembles of humans doing things with things and with each other. To be objective, we should aim to track these human and nonhuman objects and give them a chance to object to what is said about them. My argument to be developed in the present context is that research interviewers could do the same in the sense of reporting carefully when interview participants object to how we interpret their statements.

Latour (2000) stated that, so far, social scientists have been trying to imitate a somewhat wrong image of the natural sciences. The conviction has been, and to many people it certainly still is, that science is a matter of controlling the objects of study:

They have imagined that the great superiority of natural scientists resided in their dealing with objects that they have fully mastered and dominated . . . namely disinterested scientists gazing over objective entities that they could master at will and could explain by strictly causal chains. (p. 114)

In Latour's (2000) view, social scientists have false beliefs about the character of natural science: We tend to think that mastery, community, and disinterestedness are hallmarks of laboratory setups, but when looking at scientists working in laboratories, one gets quite another picture. Natural scientists work with materials that might, for example, explode, change appearance, and on those grounds "object" through the process of research to the treatment given by the researcher. It is very difficult for a natural scientist to fully master or control the objects of study. The unexpected reactions of an object in an experiment can be the very rare situation in which new thinking is provoked and the development of a new theory or a new instrument begins. Latour (2000) argued that if we really want to imitate the natural scientists, we should describe the situations where interviewees or informants object to our intervention, our questions, and the agenda of the research project. To Latour, this perspective on science comes close to the pragmatic dictum that science must let objects do things to find out what they are. However, many would argue against the previous notion that we cannot make a direct comparison between humans and nonhuman objects and between a research interview and an experiment in a laboratory.

Nevertheless, my argument is that we can learn from Latour (2000) that the objections that we might encounter and even co produce with our interviewee (e.g., when interviewees say, "No, that is not what I mean," or, "I would frame the question differently") are situations that might carry with them information important to our studies. The usual reaction would be to see such situations as a failure of establishing rapport. However, as noted already by Riesman and Benney (1956), focusing too much on rapport might maintain the nature of interviewer-interviewee relationships only by tailoring the responses of interviewees to what is expected of them. Rapport-filled interviews might produce bland, unengaged, and platitudinous responses. On the contrary, my argument is that if interview researchers were to imitate the natural sciences more realistically, they would have to find the very rare situations where humans/interviewees happen to object to the question posed to them in an interview. One could say that it is precisely when the objects of study are interested, active, disobedient, and fully involved in what is said about them that a field of social science (and not just interviewing) begins imitating the novelties of natural science. It is a reminder that a complete control of data or of the relationship between interviewer and interviewee is counter-productive for the exploration of a field or for getting to know new things about the theme of research.

Latour (2004) has drawn on political epistemology to urge scientists to take risks and to try to have their questions and their theories requalified by the research entities put to the test. The path to science requires "a passionately interested scientist who provides his or her object of study with as many occasions to show interest and to counter his or her questioning through the use of its own categories" (p. 218).

According to Latour (2004) neither distance nor empathy defines well-articulated science. You might fail to register the counter questioning of those you interrogate either because you are too distanced or because you are drowning them in your own empathy. To be useful, distance and empathy have to be subservient to this other touchstone: Do they help maximize the occasion for the phenomenon at hand to raise its own questions against the original intentions of the investigator, including, of course, the generous "empathic" intentions? It must be clear, according to this formulation, that abstaining from biases and prejudices is a very poor way of handling a protocol.

However, although natural objects have no precautions whatsoever in reacting contrary to the expectations of the researcher, human beings quickly lose their recalcitrance by complying with what scientists expect of them. Latour (2004) finds that the famous Milgram experiment in 1974 about American students' obedience to authority is an illustrative example of this. Latour's point is that only in the name of science is Milgram's experiment possible. "In any other situation, the students would have punched Milgram in the face . . . thus displaying a very sturdy and widely understood disobedience to authority" (p. 19).

In the present context, I suggest that interviewers learn to reflect on the meaning of objections that might be raised in a research project rather than simply ignoring them because they might embarrass the interviewer. For example, objections can tell us that we were actually not listening to what was said or that we misinterpreted a statement. In the most radical sense, objections can sometimes turn an interview project upside down by questioning the whole agenda and theme of the conducted interview. As such, the baseline argument is not that the interviewer should intentionally provoke objections from interviewees but that objections are seen as part of a validation exercise in qualitative research interviewing. Rather than reporting mostly on affirmations of our research agenda and theme, why not also report carefully when we learn from our interview participants' objections so that we might gain new insights into what we do as researchers?

The present article is also inspired by Parker's (2005) suggestion to make the interview "an encounter that reveals patterns of power and creative refusal of a set research agenda" (p. 52). Parker has suggested an interview practice where interviewer and interviewee are seen as co-researchers, and where the relationship between researcher and research participant is sometimes turned upside down so that the participants ask the questions and conduct interviews with the researcher. I do not, in particular, consider a completely changed relation between researcher and research participants a good idea, but I do suggest that the interviewer, as part of a reflective interview practice, pay attention to when interviewees object to the misrepresentations we sometimes make of them.

Another source of inspiration to the present article is the consideration of the research interview as a conversation resembling the image of discourses crossing each other like swords in a duel (Tinggaard, 2003, 2007). A crossing discourse interview is seen as a setting in which discourses cross each other to produce subjective experience. Elsewhere I have explicitly discussed how this kind of discursive interviewing can be part of radical psychological research in line with Parker's proposals (Tinggaard, 2007). This radical methodological view works on the basis that the account of the interviewee is seen not as something that can be collected from his or her inner psyche but as something spoken in context and spoken against or debated, where appropriate. To see the interview as a co-produced action is in line with earlier conceptions of active interviewing (Gubrium & Holstein, 1995; Holstein & Gubrium 2003). Holstein and Gubrium have paid considerable attention to the interview as a context for intersubjective negotiations of meaning (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Fontana & Prokos, 2007). In advocating active interviews, Holstein and Gubrium argued that interviews in themselves shape the form and content of what is said and inevitably impose particular ways of understanding reality on the participant's responses. Both parties in the interview are necessarily and unavoidably active. They argue that the researcher should take advantage of the co-construction of meaning and take a more "active" view of the interview, which means being sensitive to the social construction of knowledge. This social construction is seen as a process in which we construct meaning from engaging in conversations with each other. The point presented here is that being aware of objections or hesitations toward the questions we pose is one of many ways of being aware of the ongoing construction of meaning in the interview.

To further explore the possible potential of objection awareness when conducting interviews, some instances of research interviewing, which can be seen as contexts for “small” objections to the questions and to the agenda of the actual interview, are presented below. They do not thoroughly conform to Latour’s (2000, 2004) ideas of tracking radical objections and resistance, but they show signs of reluctance toward the researcher’s agenda, and they provoke the researchers to reconsider their research topics. The intention of the next section is not to present empirical research results as such but for these examples to create a context for further discussion of the possible character of objections in qualitative research interviewing.

### Examples of objections as part of interviewing

In the following section, three different instances are presented as a basis for discussing how the interview researcher might become aware of objections to the questions or to the agenda of the interviewer in interview practices. The first example is taken from published research on informal learning done by others, whereas the last examples are from my research on vocational education and learning among educational psychologists.

#### Interviewers as “space invaders”

A group of Australian researchers recently published an article on workplace learning in which they view themselves as “space invaders” (Solomon, Boud, & Rooney, 2006). This article is mentioned here because it is an example of an (unintended) application of a very active interview approach in which the participants are invited to “fight back” regarding the interpretations made by the researchers of the importance of informal learning.

The Australian researchers were investigating so-called informal learning spaces in public schools within four different workgroups of vocational school teachers in Australia (Solomon et al., 2006). As part of the project, they conducted interviews with the teachers. Afterward, they returned the interview transcripts to the teachers, who then turned out to be very ambivalent about referring to informal periods of time such as during lunch or in the tearoom as a *learning space*. In the article it is shown how the teachers became engaged in a discussion with the researchers about this particular issue. By including the controversial conversations in the article, the researchers open up the research process for further scrutiny by the reader. These interviews took place as part of a co analysis session after the first round of interviews with the teachers. This is important in the present context because it can be an example of how objection may occur as part of second-round interviews and be very productive for the research process:

*Researcher:* How do you learn from each other as a team of teachers? Do you learn from each other?

*Trade teacher:* Well, we don’t . . . Ok, we do to an extent. At lunchtime we’re always sitting around the table and something will come up and we’ll look at it there. (p. 7)

The trade teacher initially seems to deny that they learn from each other as teachers. However, after a short pause, the teacher rephrases the statement by saying that they might be learning something during their common discussions at lunchtime. Later, during the discussion with the teachers, the researcher likewise attempted to name the tearoom space an informal learning space. Another teacher clearly resisted this suggestion:

*Researcher:* You know how we were talking about informal learning spaces and how the lunchroom is a good example of that. And there's a lot of everyday talk that goes on there and lots of learning as well.

*Trade teacher:* I don't think we think about that as learning. I don't walk about here thinking I learned something today. To me, it's not a learning environment. The classroom's a learning from me, to the student. The Lunchroom sitting around here it is not a learning environment at all. Even though I have learned something.

*Researcher:* It seems to me a lot of learning takes place . . .

*Trade teacher:* I'm sure there is learning there all the time, but I don't look at it as learning, if you know what I mean. (p. 9)

Solomon et al. (2006) argued that the teacher above could regard naming the lunchroom a learning space a transgressive act. The fact that the interviewer intended to acknowledge it formally as a learning space is seen as an intrusion into a protected environment. The researcher intervenes quite actively by suggesting that, from his or her perspective, a lot of learning must take place in such informal learning spaces as at lunchtime in the lunchroom. Seen from the standpoint of the present article, this creates the possibility for the trade teacher, through being allowed to object, to underline a difference in perspective between the teacher and the researcher. From the teacher's viewpoint, conversations in the tearoom are not looked on as learning. Although there is no radical objection taking place (e.g., the interviewee does not leave the room in protest), the interviewee seems to feel safe to protest against the researcher's interpretation that a lot of learning seems to take place.

In Solomon et al.'s (2006) study the interview presented above engages the researchers in a reflection about power relations in research, the contested nature of research acts, and naming activities in the workplace as learning. There is no mention of an intended application of active interviews, but, with the inclusion of the extensive interview sequences, we as readers can recognize aspects of a very active and collaborative research process. For example, after the initial round of data collection/generation, the teachers are invited into the "space" of data analysis and interpretation when given the opportunity to discuss the topic further with the researchers, with the aim of validating the data. Second, as part of this exercise, the researchers introduce their own interpretation of the lunchroom as a learning space, seemingly without adhering to the immediate interpretation by the teachers that this is not the case. The intention behind this might be to validate the researchers' interpretations by opening up a conversational space in the field of research.

The negotiation of meaning is not just considered an unavoidable part of engaging in research, as discussed by Holstein and Gubrium (2003). The researchers actually create spaces for analytical and interpretational work in cooperation with the teachers, who are viewed more as co-researchers than as respondents. The researchers do not seem to be afraid to introduce to the teachers the novel conceptualization of the lunch- and tearoom as learning spaces. If the researchers had just concluded in their analysis that these spaces are learning spaces, they might not have had the chance to know that the teachers actually expressed themselves to the contrary. A situation in which respondents help sort out ambiguous passages in interview transcripts has been termed a member check by Guba and Lincoln (1989), but this example is slightly different because the respondents are given this opportunity during the process of conducting the interviews.

## Dominance and resistance power plays in interviewing

As is the case in the Australian research mentioned previously (Solomon et al., 2006), the theme of refusing to name work as learning was also a central result of part of a doctoral project on learning that I conducted in a Danish manufacturing company in 2001 and 2002 (Tanggaard, 2006). The research entailed extensive participant observation and qualitative interviews with 10 apprentices. Vocational training in Denmark takes 4 years, and the apprentices primarily receive training in a workplace, with the exception of five periods of 5 or 10 weeks each in a vocational school. All names of the apprentices have been changed for the purposes of anonymity. In this context, the narrative data serve to illustrate the element of meaning negotiation in qualitative research interviewing. The reader should keep in mind that I did not approach the study with the intention of conducting active interviewing. The intention was to do semistructured lifeworld interviews inspired by Giorgi's (1985) earlier interviews about learning in everyday life. It was only after having conducted the interviews and while doing a more focused analysis of the material that I realized that the apprentices did not really talk much about learning but that it was me introducing the novel concept of learning to them. Although this could be conceived of as a huge mistake, I came to realize during the analysis that it became part of producing new insights that moved my research project in an unexpected direction. How could I do a research project on learning if the apprentices really did not see themselves as learners? I realized I had to be careful about the concept of learning and more so of seeing learning as an isolated concept removed from the social practices of everyday life.

### An interview with Bjarne

The interview extracts below are from an interview conducted with Bjarne in the company workplace in November 2001. Bjarne had already completed high school but intended to use his training in electro mechanics as a basis for further training in the summer of 2002. The interview lasted an hour and was transcribed verbatim in 17 A4 pages.

The interview illustrates a contradiction between the researcher's focus on "learning for the sake of learning" and the interviewee's assumptions that learning is something done only to get a formal education and to advance oneself economically:

*I:* One thing I have been wondering. A lot of you guys stay after work either to do troubleshooting on your own equipment or to do unpaid work after hours?

*Bjarne:* Yes.

*I:* What do you learn from that?

*Bjarne:* It depends on what kind of moonlighting we do. Of course, we want to be allowed to just potter around with something in which we see some benefit. If you have an old computer monitor at home and it's broken, then you bring it to work and fiddle with it to see if you can find out what's wrong. It's not . . . you know, we are not allowed to work on our own television at work. You do not learn that (officially), you learn about an instrument. To build your own amplifier is also something other than measuring some electronic equipment down here.

*I:* Okay, so you do it to get some experience with more types of instruments and equipment?

*Bjarne:* No, it's not to get experience; it's to apply what you have learned at school for your own profit. A broken computer monitor—you fix the old one so you don't need to buy one. If you build an amplifier, well, it's much cheaper than having to

buy one yourself. It's not to learn something extra, it's done simply out of interest, or because you can earn some cash repairing a friend's video.

At the beginning of the interview sequence with Bjarne, the interviewer understands that apprentices moonlight as an active and deliberate effort to gain experience and learn from working on various pieces of electronic equipment. The assumption is that the apprentices moonlight to supplement their formal training. However, Bjarne quickly denied this and described moonlighting as something done for one's own benefit.

There is then an economic interest in moonlighting, and Bjarne is driven primarily by this motivation and not by a desire to learn from this activity. This part of the interview shows the interviewee's rejection of the researcher's interpretation of moonlighting as a learning activity in stating, "No, it's not to learn something extra."

In the following interview sequence with Bjarne, the productive, meaning-making process of ongoing interpretation and validation of the statements made by the interviewee is clear. The interviewee is allowed to fight back in response to the interpretations made of his statements. This type of interaction is clearly present in the following sequence:

*I:* Okay. It seems like something of a contradiction when you say it's not to learn something, it's just for interest or to make money?

*Bjarne:* I don't think of it as learning.

*I:* But you do learn something through it?

*Bjarne:* Yes, but it's not like when you come home from school and say, "I don't understand this, now I want to learn until I do understand." And then you go and ask for a job where you need to do just that. It's not like you go and choose a monitor so you can learn about it. You have a monitor at home which is broken and you decide to fix it. Then you find out something about it.

In this context the interviewer challenges contradictions and conflicts in the assumptions made by the apprentice regarding the possible places where learning occurs and the motivation to learn. The interviewer asks leading questions. One could legitimately object to this style of interviewing on the basis that it might not be in the interest of the apprentices or that it represented a failure of establishing rapport. In some respects, this is true, but it also creates a space in the interview in which the apprentice is given an opportunity to voice possible conflicts between intentional and unintentional learning that might not have come up if the interviewer had not been asking leading questions. Furthermore, in my experience as interviewer, the above interviews did take place in a relaxed and positive atmosphere. The apprentices knew me from the extensive field studies that I had conducted at their workplace(s), and we had therefore already established some common ground and an atmosphere of mutual trust. The apprentices also informed me that they found it beneficial to talk about their educational experiences with me and that they also found it "quite fun" to be interviewed. In this sense, reasonably extensive knowledge of the field and the persons interviewed can be seen as a condition for an open-minded conversation.

Knowledge of and experience with a particular field as a condition for doing research was emphasized by the anthropologist Lave in an interview with Kvale (1992). Lave argued that an intensive study of the literature is needed prior to conducting anthropological research and that more formal conversations with the participants in a field can be done only when the researcher, as part of the process, gets to know the basic issues confronting the respondents. Similar arguments can be found in Bourdieu (1999), who has argued that social proximity and familiarity provide two of the necessary conditions for "nonviolent" communication. Bourdieu is convinced



that this can be achieved if interviewers know the habitus, the social practice and the lifestyle, of the participants in the research process. In this way, questions can be tailored to the specific lives of the respondents.

With respect to the previous examples, I am personally, in various respects, too different from the apprentices to achieve this (by virtue of being a woman, mother, researcher, and teacher), but my knowledge of their lives gained from the extensive field studies surely helped create a relationship of trust that was a basic condition for an open-minded but also sometimes quite confrontational dialogue about the meaning of learning something. A possible side effect of this kind of interviewing is that it might be relatively straightforward to write up the results of the study in a meaningful manner. The conversation enables an ongoing validation of the meaning of what is said, and the full burden of analyzing the data does not revolve on the period after the interviews.

### **Learning from the interviewee**

The final example in the present article is from a study conducted by the author and a colleague (Tanggaard & Elmholdt, 2007). In this study we explored learning trajectories and the professional identity of educational psychologists in the Danish school system. For the study, 15 interviews were conducted in 2004 across two local units of educational psychology service offices. The interviews were semistructured, applying an interview guide that related to the overall research theme: How do psychologists respond to changes in organizational and professional identity caused by an increased focus on delivering consultative services in educational counseling? Underlying themes were learning resources and barriers related to professional identity, and problems and dilemmas within educational consultation. In the initial phases of the research project, guided by a literature review, we drew a distinction between expert and process consultation. However, we learned through the interviews that such a line should perhaps not be drawn too sharply and that objections by the interviewees to our questions helped us to gain a better understanding of the actual work of psychologists working as consultants. In contrast to the previous example of an interviewer being quite different from the interviewees (regarding age, sex, and job position), the following is an example of psychologists interviewing each other and therefore having some common ground regarding basic education and professional language. However, the interviewee is a much more experienced psychologist than the interviewer. In the interview quote below, the interviewer, Claus, is interviewing a psychologist (Hanne) about work roles and the difference between working as an expert as opposed to a process consultant with teachers in schools.

*Hanne:* I am aware of when I am an expert, and when I am more process-oriented and whenever one of the roles is present.

*Claus:* And when are you aware of that? Are you . . . is it possible to say that you reflect upon it, because you think something else needs to be done now, or is it more on reflecting that you need to change roles?

*Hanne:* No, no, it is in the situation, that I judge, well now I need to apply my knowledge about perception for example, and what it means to a child to have difficulties with navigating in a social space. No matter how much I work together with a teacher, you know don't you, she cannot find knowledge which she does not have.

In the interview quote, the interviewee begins by stating that she is aware of being either an expert or a process consultant. The interviewer tries to clarify this utterance. However, instead of perhaps asking more elegantly, "Could you give me an example of this?" the interviewer begins to engage in a more conceptual argument about the role of reflection in changing work roles. The

interviewee objects to this concern about reflection and clarifies that such judgment takes place while working and not on reflection. One could legitimately argue that the interviewer fails in listening to the interviewee. The interviewer is possibly getting too involved in the theme of the research because of a shared interest in psychology with the interviewee. A more “neutral” interviewer might have been a better listener. However, it might be in exactly these kinds of expert interviews that such conceptual clarification can be used as a validation exercise.

As with the other interviews we conducted with the psychologists, these clarifications really did matter to the psychologists. The interviewer featured in the above quotation could, in this respect, be said to be quite finely attuned to the world of psychologists and their ways of talking. Hanne (the interviewee) did not seem to have problems with objecting to the interviewer. However, it might have been different if the relation of power between the interviewer and the interviewee had been different and more unequal, with the interviewee being in a somewhat lower social position. My argument so far is that the raising of objections in interviewing might tell us that the interviewer is on the wrong track and should learn to listen more carefully, but, at the same time, they might actually be the points in time in interviews where we learn the most about our interview participants because objections enable an ongoing validation exercise.

### **Discussion**

The argument made in this article is that one can conceive of the possible objections or just forms of resistance by interviewees to the research questions and agenda or both as a valuable part of the interview in itself and the overall research process, on the condition that these objections are reflected on critically by the researcher. In the research projects presented in this article, such kinds of interview were not created deliberately. However, I found that the objections contributed to gaining new insights on the research topics. For example, the fact that the interviewees voiced critique of the assumptions and interpretations made by the researchers produced a critical awareness about research on learning in everyday life in both research projects on this theme. Nevertheless, the objections are not as radical as when natural objects explode in the laboratory; they are more modest. No one leaves the room in radical protest to the researcher’s agenda. Such situations would be signs of more radical resistance, and the lesson learned from reading Latour (2000, 2004) is that we should keep describing these situations of resistance, no matter how radical they are.

The argument underlying the present article is that researchers doing qualitative interviews could or, indeed, should become more aware of the potential offered by the critique to their agenda that might sometimes occur as part of their research projects. Although such critique, objections, or denial of interpretations might be present in the first interview with a particular interviewee, they can also be present in second-round interviews, where both researcher and research participants can be critical co-interpreters of the texts produced from the first interview setting. The parties in the interview might, in this respect, reach out to each other (metaphorically), challenge each other’s assumptions, and inquire into possible conflicts. The reasons for interviewees to object can be manifold. They might feel the need to correct the interpretations made by the interviewer or be embarrassed by the way they have come across in the interview, and they might object to correct their earlier statements. In each instance, the interviewer and researcher will have to consider carefully why the objections were made.

Furthermore, it must always be the interviewee who decides if she or he wishes to “question the questions” of the interviewer. The interviewer should not provoke such situations per se but, rather, be sensitive enough to remain open to the possibility that the interviewee might feel a need

to object to the interpretations made by the researcher. When this happens, it can allow for a fruitful exploration of the theme of conversation and the researcher's agenda. A condition for this to take place can be that the interviewee and interviewer know each other beforehand and have therefore already created a common basis of trust and knowledge of each other.

### **Confrontational style**

The interview extracts previously cited can be regarded as examples of a confrontational interview style. One could object that this form closes rather than opens up the ongoing dialogue and conversation. However, in discussing legal counseling and interviewing, Shaffer and Elkins (2005) have argued that in a warm and open inquiry relationship, it is possible for the interviewer to use a confrontational style of interviewing and for it to remain effective. Shaffer and Elkins cited Kinsey (1948), who conducted (the renowned) interviews on sexual behavior in which he used to confront the interviewees with his intuitive suspicion that they were lying to him. The examples given in this article support the assumption that a relaxed and trusting relationship between interviewer and interviewee, possibly enabled through knowing each other and both having extensive knowledge of the field or "world" of the participants before the actual interview, creates a good context for interviewing to produce negotiations of meaning. As argued by Potter and Hepburn (2005), the importance of a warm and relaxed atmosphere between the interviewer and the interviewee is acknowledged within most interview approaches. Although it is often seen as a matter of obtaining good rapport, I see it as a matter of giving the interviewee the confidence to "fight back" against the questions posed to him or her.

### **Dialogue and power**

It is important to keep in mind that dialogues within human and/or discursive relationships are never entirely free of power imbalances and conflict. The interview might include aspects of manipulation and instrumentality, despite a humanistic ethos of mutuality and co authorship, as in visions of active interviews presented in the present context (Burman, 1997). Following the interpretational approach of Foucault (1995), active interviewer-interviewee relations are powerful because they invite the interviewee into the field of research as a collaborator (Brinkman & Kvale, 2005; Kvale, 2006; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). Ultimately, it is the researcher who takes control over data (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997; Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). However, the issue here is not to argue in favor of the superior qualities of one form of interview over another or to eliminate issues of power but to explore the prospects for becoming more aware of the very rare situations where interviewees might object to what is said about them and to the questions we ask and to critically analyze the local meanings of these situations.

### **Similar approaches**

As mentioned in the earlier section on sources of inspiration, the present article is inspired by Latour (2000, 2004, 2005) and, in particular, the idea of objections serving as valuable feedback in social science research. It is also inspired by Parker (2005) and his book on radical psychology. In particular, Parker suggested that "radical research in qualitative psychology is the subversion and transformation of how we can come to know more about psychology" (p. 19). Parker presented interviewing as one way to do this through a process in which the research relationships in interview studies are critically explored to open the path for objections to the agenda of the researcher. Similarly, in advocating participatory forms of inquiry, Reason (1994) stated that if

we wish to develop a science of persons, we should invent methods that treat participants as self-determining persons. Accordingly, they should not be excluded from the thinking and decision-making that generates, designs, manages, and draws conclusions from the research. As part of the research, what they do and think must be determined by them to some degree.

Although participatory forms of inquiry involve the participants to a much larger extent than in the above kinds of interview practices, I share the idea that if inquiry is engaged in the service of developing people and theories of these persons' lives, it will engage with them in dialogue. Recent proposals for doing so are more radical than those proposed here; for example, I do not consider whether the research participants will also be part of the design phase of the interview study. However, other researchers might find this appropriate, and interviewing might well form part of participatory inquiries of different kinds. A participatory inquiry often involves a time-consuming involvement of the researcher within the field of research. The participatory researchers will therefore often acquire an intensive knowledge of the field and develop a common ground of trust with the research participants. This might serve precisely as a condition for interviewees' trust to object, so one could argue that participatory research designs or field studies could serve as good conditions for objections to occur in conversations and interviews with the researcher.

### Reservations

Some might object that the goal of interview practices has never been the imitation of the natural sciences, so why argue for such an imitation? Research interviewing will have to be framed within its own phenomenological and hermeneutic framework as described, for example, by Larkin, Watts, and Clifton (2006). Power differentials between researcher and interviewees (due to age, class, rank, etc.) might also influence the occurrence of objections and sometimes prevent them. However, the basic point in the present context is not that an imitation per se of the natural scientists is a valuable goal in itself but to point to the moments of research practices where we might learn from the same things; namely, the objections that research participants might voice toward the researcher. Dinkins (2005) recently argued that what I here term objections can be part of interviewing within an interpretative framework. She wrote a critique of the dominant narrative approach to current interviewing processes in nursing research and other fields.

In narrative interviewing the respondent is encouraged to tell his or her life story with as little prompting and interruptions from the interviewer as possible. Although this can lead to interesting research results, the interviewer does not engage in a dialogue or conversation with the interviewee. Instead, the interviewer avoids "leading" the respondent to allow the story to take its own course. One problem with this is that it does not facilitate immediate reflection by either the researcher or the participant on the possibly diverging interpretations of the conversation themes, and it does not allow for much objection. In contrast to the narrative approach to interviewing, Dinkins suggests going back to the Socratic method of inquiry, also referred to as his *elenchus*, a shared dialogue. Socrates and his interlocutors search together for understanding, questioning each other's beliefs, and help each other to clarify their own thoughts:

Because the inquiry is a shared one, Socrates puts himself very much into the inquiry. He expresses surprise when an interlocutor says something he didn't expect, he challenges beliefs that seem to conflict, and he acknowledges his own assumptions and allow them to affect the dialogue. He is never passive, and he never simply asks a question and lets the answer lie. (Dinkins, 2005, p. 116)

If interviewing is turned into an inquiry resembling a Socratic dialogue, the researcher acknowledges that he or she is part of the inquiry. The researcher will check her assumptions with the interviewee, and remain open to the possibility that these assumptions might be changed—through objections, for example—as part of the dialogue. Socrates (Plato, 1981) believed that his inquiries with the young men in Athens could be compared to midwifery, where the innate ideas of the young men could be “given life.” We might say that Socrates was our first active interviewer, although the Sophists before him also taught young people the art of rhetoric and conversation. Nevertheless, the Sophists’ main intention was to persuade people and convince them that certain worldviews were better than others, whereas Socrates believed that the task was to make people aware of the knowledge they already processed. As argued by Dinkins (2005), with interviewing turned into a real dialogue as part of shared inquiry, each party examines its beliefs, seeks out and deals with conflicts, and may reject the beliefs that they hold less dear. They will ideally move closer and closer to a deeper and better understanding. Although this deeper understanding represented inner truths, in the view of Socrates (Plato, 1981), it will, rather, be seen as a result of a nuanced, detailed, and negotiated social interaction in the framework of active interviewing where we grasp qualitative aspects of human life as they can be spoken through conversation.

### Conclusion

In this article the intention was to explore why objections to the agenda or the question of the researcher can be seen as valuable parts of interviewing in research practice. I analyzed and discussed some actual examples of research interviewing where objections to the agenda of the interviewer did show up or were created in the shared inquiry between the interviewer and the interviewee. This analysis was inspired by Latour’s (2000, 2004) ideas of objections as a sign of “good” science and by the epistemological ideas behind radical psychology (Parker, 2005) and active interviews that were initially described by Gubrium and Holstein (1995) and Holstein and Gubrium (2003). The particular contribution of the present article is to emphasize that interviewers can gain valuable knowledge from being sensitive toward the occurrence of objections voiced by participants in interview projects. Objections can be the result of a failure to establish a rapport, but the argument in the present context would be that they can also constitute a valuable aspect of interviewing and be part of moving closer and closer to a better understanding of human and nonhuman life. It is argued that the interviewer should not provoke such situations per se but, rather, be sensitive enough to remain open to the possibility that the interviewer might feel a need to object to the interpretations made by the researcher. When this happens, it can allow for a fruitful exploration of the theme of conversation and the researcher’s agenda. A condition for this to take place can be that the interviewee and interviewer know each other beforehand and have therefore already created a common basis of trust.

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