

# RETHINKING METHODS IN PSYCHOLOGY



Edited by  
Jonathan A. Smith,  
Rom Harré  
and  
Luk Van Langenhove

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**Paul Drew** lectures in sociology at the University of York, UK teaching courses associated with conversational analysis and its application to institutional and workplace interactions – which are also the foci of his research, and the areas in which he has published widely (including most recently a co-edited collection, *Talk at Work* with John Heritage, 1992).

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**John Heron** has for many years been a leading figure in humanistic and transpersonal approaches to education, research and human development. He is noted in particular for his articulation of co-operative inquiry; for his contribution to the theory and practice of humanistic facilitation; and for his radical perspective on human personhood as set out in his book *Feeling and Personhood* (1992).

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**Peter Reason** is currently Director of the Centre for Action Research in Professional Practice at the University of Bath. He has been developing the theory and practice of collaborative approaches to inquiry for over 15 years. His most recent book is *Participation in Human Inquiry* (1994).

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**Rex Stainton Rogers** is a lecturer in psychology at the University of Reading. He is co-author of *Stories of Childhood* (1992), *Textuality and Tectonics* (1994), and *Social Psychology: A Critical Agenda* (1995) and a part of 'Beryl Curt' which is a forum for critical social theorists.

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**Krysia Yardley** is Unit Consultant Clinical Psychologist for Merthyr and Cynon Valley Health Unit and District Adviser for Mid Glamorgan Health Authority. She has specific research interests in qualitative methodologies and epistemological issues, especially as related to role play techniques and to psychodynamic therapies. She has published in the areas of social skills, self and identity, role play and psychotherapy research.

# 1 Introduction

*Jonathan A. Smith, Rom Harré and  
Luk Van Langenhove*

This is an exciting time for psychology. A number of methodologies consonant with a shift to a post-positivist, non-experimental paradigm are now emerging and they are beginning to be used in a wide range of empirical studies. As these studies proliferate and are published, there will be a real chance of fundamentally changing the discipline of psychology, of dramatically redrawing its boundaries to include a whole set of new questions, asked and answered in new ways. In this book we present a range of these new ways of working. Practicality is a key issue. We hope that after reading the contributions in the book, readers will feel encouraged to embark on research projects using the methods outlined.

The book is primarily focused on methods rather than concepts. It is, in fact, part of a series of books addressing new ways of looking at psychology and one of the companion volumes (*Rethinking Psychology* [1995b], also edited by Smith, Harré and Van Langenhove) is devoted to alternative conceptual foundations for psychology. The opening chapters of that book set the scene for the paradigm shift occurring in the discipline and subsequent chapters are concerned with important alternative theoretical approaches, all of which can be said to be contributing to a rethinking of what psychology is. Because of the close links between the theoretical and methodological arguments for a new paradigm, we would recommend readers of this volume to look at *Rethinking Psychology* as well.

Later in this chapter we will outline the organizing principles of the book and introduce each of the methodological approaches we have included. First, however, a brief contextualization for the emergence of these alternative methods is provided.

## **The changing discipline**

What has led to the sense of historical moment we have signalled in the opening paragraph? For many years, discontent has been expressed with a narrowness in the discipline of psychology, with its emphasis on laboratory studies, experimental design and statistical analysis and an epistemology based on a particular conception of the natural sciences. This discontent was manifested in a number of works which took a critical slant

on academic psychology and pointed to the limitations of its practice. A number of the classic critiques appeared in the 1970s (Gergen, 1973; Harré and Secord, 1972; Shotter, 1975). While much of this work seemed particularly focused on social psychology, which can be portrayed as undergoing a continual series of crises (Parker, 1989), dissatisfaction with aspects of the mainstream was also expressed in other quarters (for example, Neisser, 1976).

What was the effect of the disaffection? Psychology has clearly witnessed a move away from the hegemony of the laboratory experiment in the last two decades. Thus Neisser's call for ecological validity seems to have been heeded as more 'real-world' studies are conducted. This move to a more naturalistic psychology operates at a number of levels. First, psychology has become more open to research on a range of previously neglected areas which are central to the psychology of everyday life, illustrated, for example, by the explosion of work on the self (see, for example, Honess and Yardley, 1987; Markus and Wurf, 1987; Shotter and Gergen, 1989) and the growth of research in autobiographical memory (Conway, 1990; Rubin, 1986). Secondly, there is a greater openness to different types of data collection, for example field experiments, diary studies, self-reports. Thirdly, more studies are attempting to include more appropriate participant groups, moving beyond the student population which has overwhelmingly provided the 'subjects' for experimental psychology (but see Sears, 1986).

A central component of the discipline has remained essentially unchanged, however. The quantitative imperative still dictates the form of data to be collected and how it is to be analysed. Thus, psychological studies of autobiographical memory or the self still, for the most part, involve categorization of responses for statistical comparison between groups. And a crucial aspect of the critique of mainstream psychology is precisely at this level of method. Harré and Secord (1972) were particularly concerned not just with the subject matter of psychology and where it was conducted but also with psychological measurement – the reductionism implicit in the manipulation of variables and the dominance of quantification. For Harré and Secord, the methods and measurements academic psychology used reflected the mechanistic model of human beings it seemed to subscribe to.

Thus it can be argued that, in order to be able to conceive of itself as truly embarked on a post-positivist paradigm, psychology needs to find new methods, methods which are more appropriate to the questions it now wants to ask and to the settings in which it wants to ask them. Gordon Allport had, much earlier, captured this nicely: 'We should adapt our methods so far as we can to the object and not define the object in terms of our faulty methods' (1963: 28). We believe this methodological shift is now occurring. A range of alternative methods for conducting psychological inquiry are now available, as reflected in the number and diversity of contributions to this book.

## Guiding principles

The first word that we agreed on when considering what the book should be like was 'pluralistic'. We are not advocating a singular theoretical or methodological position here but, rather, wish to present a whole array of new ways of working. While they share a commitment to producing a new form of psychology, the methods arise from a range of different theoretical viewpoints. It is our intention neither to be partisan about these different positions nor to pretend that the differences do not exist. Our primary aim is to make the range of approaches available so that the reader can engage in the debates and make informed choices about different ways of working. Further, we think the diversity is a healthy reflection of the multifaceted new paradigm.

While we are emphasizing diversity, it is also true that the methodologies do have considerable commonalities. We had certain guiding principles in mind when selecting methods to include and these principles form a fuzzy set – each approach draws upon a number of the principles but no single principle is privileged. The principles represent a set of concerns which we feel marks out the new paradigm in psychology:

- 1 Research conducted in the 'real world'.
- 2 A recognition of the central role of language and discourse.
- 3 Life and research perceived as processual or as a set of dynamic interactions.
- 4 A concern with persons and individuals rather than actuarial statistics and variables.

Thus, none of the methodologies is based on laboratory experiments. Rather, they are attempting to construct ways of working which are more appropriate to, and, in some sense, a closer reflection of, psychological life. Most of the methods reflect a recognition of the importance of language in the construction of psychological reality, and that this construction comes about in the dynamic interactions between people. Most of the approaches in this book are qualitative. However, we are not setting qualitative versus quantitative as a defining characteristic of the new paradigm. Rather, it is argued that the role of numbers will be rather different in a new psychology. Finally, one thread of the new paradigm arises from a frustration with academic psychology's failure to address human individuality, which is lost in the gross averaging of statistical manipulations. Thus, some psychologists are attempting to find methods more appropriate to the study of individuals and a number of the contributions here represent part of that move towards an idiographic psychology.

We see these as key issues for a new paradigm in psychology. The complex, patterned relationship between these principles and the methods included in this book will become apparent in the different chapters.

Most of the contributors are psychologists, but some come from cognate disciplines. Part of the excitement of the new paradigm comes from a

cross-fertilization across disciplines. For example, sociologists and anthropologists have been employing qualitative methods for many decades. We would argue that these methods, and the philosophies behind them, transcend rather flimsy discipline boundaries and are equally appropriate (indeed particularly appropriate) for psychological investigations.

### **Making it work**

We are assuming that there are many psychologists – researchers, post-graduates and undergraduates – who are now, perhaps from an awareness of the conceptual shifts reflected in *Rethinking Psychology*, looking for a different way to conduct psychological studies but not sure how to set about it. Therefore, practicality and accessibility are given priority. Each chapter has been written with the specific intention of helping to guide the reader through the stages of conducting a study using the particular method concerned. Indeed we hope that, amongst its uses (though not as its exclusive use), the book may be adopted as part of psychology research methods courses.

The book is not overloaded with philosophical concepts – we see it and *Rethinking Psychology* as intimately connected – and the methods presented here draw on the foundations laid in the previous one. At the same time, the methods are not presented in a vacuum. Each contributor gives a brief summary of the theoretical assumptions which underlie the particular method being described.

We also do not intend to privilege method or put it on a pedestal. While our aim is to present clear guidelines for conducting research, all these methods make particular demands on the resources and skills of the researcher, who thereby becomes the key instrument in the inquiry. We are stressing practicalities and making procedures accessible because our primary aim is to encourage newcomers to have a go. Doing research in the ways outlined in this book can seem daunting and we are conscious that, if these methodologies are to be more widely taken up, clear guidance needs to be given.

### **The contributions**

#### *The search for meanings*

The three contributions in this section form a coherent set. Each can be seen as derived from the qualitative tradition in the social sciences influenced by, for example, phenomenology and symbolic interactionism. Here the emphasis is on attempting to understand the psychological conceptions of participants. In order to do this, qualitative researchers in this tradition conduct interviews or collect other forms of verbal material, and the resultant transcripts or other documents are then subjected to

close textual analysis. It is argued that this is necessary if one is attempting to understand the meanings their psychological and social worlds hold for respondents. At the same time all three contributions recognize the important role the investigator has in shaping the research project. The respondent's story only becomes available through intensive interpretative engagement on the part of the researcher.

In Chapter 2, Jonathan A. Smith discusses the stages involved in conducting a semi-structured interview project, from an interpretative phenomenological perspective. Thus it is a practical guide to one form of qualitative methodology. The stages involved are: formulating questions, constructing an interview schedule, conducting the interview, analysis and writing up.

In Chapter 3, Kathy Charmaz introduces grounded theory as a systematic way of working with qualitative data. This approach has a long tradition in sociology but is at last being recognized as a useful and equally appropriate method for psychologists (Henwood and Pidgeon, 1992). While, as Charmaz discusses, there are varying orientations within the grounded theory field, her own approach is consonant with the interpretative phenomenological approach outlined in Chapter 2. Indeed the two chapters complement each other in that while Smith's chapter has presented an overview of the different stages involved in one form of qualitative research, this chapter provides a more detailed treatment of one of the stages: analysis.

In Chapter 4, Ken Plummer focuses on another long-established approach within the social sciences, the construction of life histories. Again, this method has been utilized by sociologists, and other social scientists, but has generally been neglected by psychology. The chapter discusses the different stages through which life stories are assembled but also usefully completes this section by concentrating on questions which arise when writing up life histories. Although the chapter is firmly grounded in work in life history, many of the issues it raises are pertinent to all qualitative projects.

### *Discourse as topic*

For the contributions in this section, discourse becomes a topic for study in its own right. The types of questions these approaches address include: How is conversation organized? What social function does the organization have? What discursive resources do people draw on or bring to their social interactions? Research in this tradition also involves looking at transcripts in fine detail. However, the questions these methodologies ask and their epistemological foundations are rather different from those in the previous section. The third chapter in this connected set is concerned with some issues around the transcription process itself – a vital part of work in conversation or discourse analysis.

In Chapter 5, Paul Drew introduces conversation analysis. The chapter

first considers some of the conceptual and methodological foundations of conversation analysis, and outlines the distinctiveness of its perspective in contrast, for example, with the usual cognitivist or information-processing models of much psychological research. It then describes how the methodology works in practice, that is, how conversational data are analysed to reveal systematic properties of the organization of conversation. Detailed illustrations of conversation analysis are provided as part of this treatment.

In Chapter 6, Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell begin with an outline of key theoretical principles in discourse analysis. They point to two broad elements in the analysis of discourse: discursive practices and the resources people draw on in those practices. For the purposes of this chapter, they concentrate on the latter concern and its theorization in terms of 'interpretative repertoires'. The chapter includes both guidance on how to conduct discourse analysis and detailed examples of the authors' own work, drawing on previously published studies of racist discourse in New Zealand.

Researchers analysing conversation and discourse usually work with verbatim transcripts of spoken data. In Chapter 7, Daniel O'Connell and Sabine Kowal discuss the purposes of transcription, suggest criteria for evaluating transcription systems and then propose a set of principles which can be applied to the transcription requirements of particular studies. They argue that the search for a single, all-purpose transcription system must be abandoned in favour of systems tailored to the purposes of specific research projects.

### *Research as dynamic interaction*

Most or all of the contributions to this book would consider research as representing one form of social interaction. Thus, research is not an activity completely divorced from everyday social practices, although it is, admittedly, a rather unusual form of that practice. For the two chapters in this section, however, dynamic engagement between people becomes a focal part of the research endeavour. While the two methods are in many respects different, they converge in making the process of interaction which takes place the very substance of the research itself.

In Chapter 8, Kryisia Yardley provides a conceptual framework for understanding how role play works as a technique for psychological research. She then describes essential features of role play and links each to the theoretical underpinning. She goes on to describe the importance of induction principles as part of a discussion of general guidelines for conducting role plays.

In Chapter 9, Peter Reason and John Heron argue that we are in the middle of a paradigm shift towards a participatory worldview, one of the emergent expressions of which is co-operative inquiry. They review the philosophical bases for this new methodology, outlining, for example, the

arguments from a humanistic view of the person as potentially self-directing. They then describe how to conduct a co-operative inquiry, specifying the stages involved and considering issues which can arise in the process, and give a number of examples of this form of research working in practice.

### *Using numbers differently*

Much of the new psychology is based on the use of qualitative methods, as most of the contributions to this collection demonstrate. However, it is possible to use numbers in a different way from that conceived of in experimental, variable-centred methodology, as each of the chapters in this section illustrates. Each approach inverts the logic of normal quantitative design by beginning by looking at quantitative relations within an individual rather than within group statistics. At the same time the three approaches have different theoretical orientations. These three chapters illustrate, therefore, how numbers can be used differently within a new psychology paradigm and how those numbers can find new dynamic relations with other sources of data or alternative conceptions of inquiry.

In Chapter 10, James T. Lamiell draws on the history of quantitative methods in psychology in presenting the case for an alternative role for numbers in psychological research. His own research methodology involves an exploration of statistical relations within, rather than between, persons. Lamiell argues that during the process of person perception participants are guided by what he describes as a dialectical rather than normative strategy. According to this model, respondents are concerned with what the person is like, contrasted with what he or she is not like (but might have been), rather than comparing the person with other people or with group norms. Lamiell describes his method in detail and illustrates how the relevant analyses support his contention.

In Chapter 11, Jonathan A. Smith offers a particular development of repertory grid technique. The grid was devised as a method for helping to explore the individual's personal construct system. It produces idiographic, quantitative data. This chapter demonstrates how the repertory grid can be used as an instrument within a multi-method, interactive, psychological inquiry. The chapter gives an example from a research project on identity change during the transition to motherhood, which illustrates grids being employed within an interpretative framework, alongside qualitative methodologies.

In Chapter 12, Rex Stainton Rogers introduces Q methodology. He provides a brief history of Q in order to place it in complementarity to R methodology (the statistics of correlating measures). In Q, 'rather than applying tests to a sample of persons . . . "persons are applied to a sample of statements"' (see p. 179 below). The more recent transformation of Q from a phenomenological to a discursive procedure is introduced. The chapter describes the stages involved in conducting a Q study.



*Concluding word*

These contributions illustrate the wide range of alternative methodologies now available to, and being employed by, psychologists. We hope our readers will, when reading the chapters which follow, feel the same sense of excitement that we do. More importantly, we hope readers will feel encouraged to try the methods themselves in their own research projects and so help contribute to the new psychology which is beginning to take shape.

# PART I

## THE SEARCH FOR MEANINGS

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### 2 Semi-Structured Interviewing and Qualitative Analysis

*Jonathan A. Smith*

This chapter is an introduction to conducting and analysing semi-structured interviews. It will briefly put the use of this method within a theoretical context and will then outline the various stages of conducting a semi-structured interview project – producing an interview schedule, conducting the interview, analysing the material and writing up. This is a practically oriented chapter – intended mainly to help a reader with no previous experience of this type of psychological research method.

In general, researchers use semi-structured interviews in order to gain a detailed picture of a respondent's beliefs about, or perceptions or accounts of, a particular topic. The method gives the researcher and respondent much more flexibility than the more conventional structured interview, questionnaire or survey. The researcher is able to follow up particularly interesting avenues that emerge in the interview and the respondent is able to give a fuller picture. Then by employing qualitative analysis an attempt is made to capture the richness of the themes emerging from the respondent's talk rather than reduce the responses to quantitative categories. While there is no automatic link between semi-structured interviewing and qualitative analysis, and it would, for example, be possible to do a statistical analysis of the frequency of certain responses in an interview, this would be to waste the opportunity provided by the detail of the verbatim interview data. Therefore this chapter assumes a 'natural' fit between semi-structured interviewing and qualitative analysis. At the same time, after one has conducted a thematic qualitative analysis, it is also possible (if one wishes and it is appropriate) to include in the write-up some indication of the prevalence of the themes within the data set.

One can in fact adopt a range of theoretical positions when one is conducting an interview study. Broadly speaking, one may, at one

extreme, believe that one is uncovering a factual record and a person's responses could be independently verified for their accuracy. At the other extreme one may assume that a person's responses form part of a locally organized interaction structure. The participant is answering in this way in order to perform certain interactive functions, for example appearing to be a good interviewee, or using expressions in order to convince the interviewer that he or she, the respondent, is an expert on this topic. It may, in the most extreme case, have no relationship to either a world outside (the factual record) or a world inside (beliefs, attitudes, etc.).

Between these two positions, one may consider that what respondents say does have some significance and 'reality' for them beyond the bounds of this particular occasion, that it is part of their ongoing self-story and represents a manifestation of their psychological world, and it is this psychological reality that one is interested in. The talk will probably also have some relationship to a world outside, though that is not the crucial point, but it will also be affected by the requirements of this particular interaction (Smith, 1995b).

This chapter is written from this middle position. It is assumed that what a respondent says in the interview has some ongoing significance for him or her and that there is some, though not a transparent, relationship between what the person says and beliefs or psychological constructs that he or she can be said to hold. This approach can be described as adopting a *phenomenological* perspective (see Giorgi, 1995). At the same time it is recognized that meanings are negotiated within a social context and that therefore this form of interviewing is also drawing on, or can be seen from, a *symbolic interactionist* position (see Denzin, 1995).

What sort of psychological topics might this approach be appropriate for? The answer is a vast array. However, semi-structured interviews and qualitative analysis are especially suitable where one is particularly interested in complexity or process or where an issue is controversial or personal. That is not to say that qualitative methods have exclusive access to these domains, but they do have a major, and as yet hardly tapped, contribution to make.

Because one's theoretical position affects one's research practice, psychologists adopting different theoretical orientations are likely to conduct and analyse interviews in ways that differ from the outline presented here. In broad terms the interpretative phenomenological approach adopted in this chapter is consonant with the theoretical position of Kathy Charmaz's chapter on grounded theory/analysis (Chapter 3, this volume) and it is useful to read these two chapters in conjunction. Then for a radically different perspective on the status of participants' talk, see Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell's chapter on discourse analysis (Chapter 6, this volume). (For an introduction to the general theoretical background to qualitative research, see Bryman, 1988, and for details of the array of different qualitative approaches which can be adopted, see Tesch, 1990.)

It is useful to contrast the primary features of a semi-structured interview with those of a structured interview.

### **How are semi-structured interviews different from structured interviews?**

#### *The structured interview*

The structured interview shares much of the rationale of the psychological experiment. Generally the investigator decides in advance exactly what constitutes the required data and constructs the questions in such a way as to elicit answers corresponding to, and easily contained within, predetermined categories which can then be numerically analysed. In order to enhance reliability, the interviewer should stick very closely to the interview schedule and behave with as little variation as possible between interviews. The interviewer will aim to:

- 1 use short specific questions;
- 2 read the question exactly as on the schedule;
- 3 ask the questions in the identical order specified by the schedule;
- 4 ideally, have precoded response categories, enabling the questioner to match what the respondent says against one of the categories on the schedule.

Sometimes the investigator will provide the respondent with a set of possible answers to choose from. Sometimes the respondent is allowed a free response which can then be categorized.

Thus, in many ways, the structured interview is like the questionnaire; and indeed the two overlap to the extent that often the interview simply consists of the investigator going through a questionnaire in the presence of a respondent, the interviewer filling in the answers on the questionnaire sheet based on what the respondent says.

The alleged advantages of the structured interview format are control, reliability and speed. That is, the investigator has maximum control over what takes place in the interview. It is also argued that the interview will be reliable in the sense that the same format is being used with each respondent, and that the identity of the interviewer should have minimal impact on the responses obtained.

The structured interview has disadvantages which arise from the constraints put on the respondent and the situation. The structured interview can be said to close off certain theoretical avenues. It deliberately limits what the respondent can talk about – this having been decided in advance by the investigator. Thus the interview may well miss out on a novel aspect of the subject, an area considered important by the respondent but not predicted, or prioritized, by the investigator. Moreover, the topics which are included are approached in a way which makes it unlikely that it will allow the unravelling of complexity or ambiguity in the

respondent's position. The structured interview can also become stilted because of the need to ask questions in exactly the same format and sequence to each participant.

This section has only offered a brief introduction to the structured interview, the aim being to provide a context in which to place a discussion of semi-structured interviewing. For more on the different types of interview used by researchers, see Brenner et al. (1985).

### *Semi-structured interviews*

With semi-structured interviews, the investigator will have a set of questions on an interview schedule but the interview will be guided by the schedule rather than be dictated by it. Here then:

- 1 there is an attempt to establish rapport with the respondent;
- 2 the ordering of questions is less important;
- 3 the interviewer is freer to probe interesting areas that arise;
- 4 the interview can follow the respondent's interests or concerns.

These differences follow from the phenomenological position adopted by most semi-structured interview projects. The investigator has an idea of the area of interest and some questions to pursue. At the same time, there is a wish to try to enter, as far as is possible, the psychological and social world of the respondent. Therefore the respondent shares more closely in the direction the interview takes and he or she can introduce an issue the investigator had not thought of. In this relationship, the respondent can be perceived as the expert on the subject and should therefore be allowed maximum opportunity to tell his or her own story.

Thus we could summarize the advantages of the semi-structured interview as follows. It facilitates rapport/empathy, allows a greater flexibility of coverage and enables the interview to enter novel areas, and it tends to produce richer data. On the costs side, this form of interviewing reduces the control the investigator has over the situation, takes longer to carry out, and is harder to analyse.

### **Constructing the semi-structured interview schedule**

Although an investigator conducting a semi-structured interview is likely to see it as a co-determined interaction in its own right, it is still important when working in this way to produce an interview schedule in advance. Why? Producing a schedule beforehand forces you to think explicitly about what you think/hope the interview might cover. More specifically, it enables you to think of difficulties that might be encountered, for example, in terms of question wording or sensitive areas and to give some thought to how these difficulties might be handled. Having thought in advance about the different ways the interview may proceed allows you, when it

comes to the interview itself, to concentrate more thoroughly and more confidently on what the respondent is saying.

### *Stages in producing the schedule*

The following section suggests a sequence for producing an interview schedule. This is only intended as a suggestion, not to be prescriptive. Also note that doing this sort of work is often iterative rather than linear, and you may find your ideas of what the interview should cover changing or developing as you work on the schedule. See Table 2.1, which presents a sample schedule from a project I am conducting on kidney disease patients' response to dialysis treatment for their illness.

1 Having determined the overall issue to be tackled in the interview, think about the broad range of themes or question areas you want your interview to cover. The three areas in the kidney dialysis project are: personal description of dialysis, effect on self, coping strategies.

2 Put the areas in the most appropriate sequence. Two questions may help here. What is the most logical order to address these areas in? Which is the most sensitive area? In general it is a good idea to leave sensitive topics till later in the interview to allow the respondent to become relaxed and comfortable speaking to you. Thus an interview on political affiliations might begin with questions on what the different political parties represent, then move on to the question of societal attitudes to politics before, in the final section, asking about the person's own voting behaviour – thus leaving the most personal and potentially most sensitive area till last. In the dialysis project, one could say all the material is sensitive – but then the respondent knows the project is about his or her health condition and has agreed to talk about it. I decided talking about the illness itself was the best way into the interview and to allow discussion of the effect on the respondent's sense of self to come later.

3 Think of appropriate questions related to each area in order to address the issue you are interested in, and again sequence the questions, thinking about the points mentioned in (2) above.

4 Think about possible probes and prompts which could follow from answers that might be given to some of your questions (see below).

### *Constructing questions*

A few pointers to constructing questions:

- 1 Questions should be neutral rather than value-laden or leading.

*Bad:* Do you agree that the prime minister is doing a bad job?

*Better:* What do you think of the prime minister's record in office so far?

- 2 Avoid jargon. Think of the language of your respondent and frame your questions in a way they will feel familiar and comfortable with.

Table 2.1 *Interview schedule: patient's experience of renal dialysis**(A) Dialysis*

- 1 Can you tell me the brief history of your kidney problem from when it started to you beginning dialysis?
- 2 Could you describe what happens in dialysis, in your own words?
- 3 What do you do when you are having dialysis?
- 4 How do you feel when you are dialysing?  
prompt: physically, emotionally, mentally.
- 5 What do you think about?
- 6 How do you feel about having dialysis?  
prompt: some people – relief from previous illness, a bind.
- 7 How does dialysis/kidney disease affect your everyday life?  
prompt: work, interests, relationships.
- 8 If you had to describe what the dialysis machine means to you, what would you say?  
prompt: what words come to mind? what images? do you have a nickname for it?

*(B) Identity*

- 9 How would you describe yourself as a person?  
prompt: what sort of person are you? most important characteristics: happy, moody, nervy.
- 10 Has having kidney disease and starting dialysis made a difference to how you see yourself?  
prompt: if so, how do you see yourself now as different to before you started dialysis? how would you say you have changed?
- 11 What about compared to before you had kidney disease?
- 12 What about the way other people see you: members of your family? friends? has this changed?

*(C) Coping*

- 13 What does the term illness mean to you? how do you define it?
- 14 How much do you think about your own physical health?
- 15 Do you see yourself as being ill?  
prompt: always, sometimes? would you say you were an ill person?
- 16 On a day to day basis how do you deal with having kidney disease (the illness)?  
prompt: do you have particular strategies for helping you? ways of coping? (practical, mental)
- 17 Do you think about the future much?

3 Try to use open not closed questions. Closed questions encourage Yes/No answers rather than getting the respondent to open up about his or her thoughts and feelings.

*Bad:* Should the president resign?

*Better:* What do you think the president should do now?

A strategy often employed in this type of interviewing is to try to encourage the person to speak about the topic with as little prompting from the interviewer as possible. This point can be seen as a development of the requirement to ask neutral rather than leading questions. One might