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## Combining Graphic Elicitation Methods and Narrative Family Interviews in a Qualitative Multimethod Design

*Andrea Hense*

**Key words:**

narrative interview;  
timeline;  
genogram; verbal  
data; visual data;  
visualization;  
triangulation;  
mixed and  
multimethod  
research; linked  
lives; biographical  
research

**Abstract:** By combining different methods, researchers can use the strengths of each to compensate the constraints of others and to more comprehensively examine their research topic. In this article, I elaborate upon the strengths and weaknesses of timelines and genograms (visual data, graphic elicitation) in comparison to narrative family interviews (verbal data collection). I explain why we integrated these methods in a collaborative research project, and discuss how we used them for the purposes of comparison, mutual compensation, or complementarity during sampling, data collection, and analysis. The methodological arguments are illustrated with empirical examples from a research project on status maintenance in middle-class families to show how we used the three methods to explore complementary perspectives on individual and linked lives and to analyze longitudinal biographical data and three-generation relationships. My intention is to open up new methodological perspectives for qualitative as well as mixed method researchers by reflecting on our qualitative design using concepts from the mixed methods and multimethod research (MMMR) discourse. Furthermore, I would like to contribute to advancing the MMMR discourse in regard to still underrepresented reconstructive or interpretative approaches. My overall aim is to reflect upon the epistemological problem of how scientists and respondents (re)construct the object of research through different methods.

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## 1. Introduction

The mixed methods research community is not only concerned with combining quantitative and qualitative methods or findings, but also focuses on combining multiple qualitative or multiple quantitative research approaches in the same study. To account for the complexity of different integrative methodologies, scientists, over time, distinguished two labels, although in practice they are sometimes used interchangeably: "mixed methods" for linking qualitative and quantitative approaches, and "multimethod" for linking diverse qualitative or different quantitative procedures (HESSE-BIBER & JOHNSON, 2015; SCHOONENBOOM & JOHNSON, 2017). Drawing on a collaborative<sup>1</sup> research project, I reflect on the process of applying visual or, more precisely, graphic elicitation methods (timelines and genograms) in addition to verbal data collection (narrative family interviews). Verbal and visual data were integrated, interrelated, and embedded within a larger case study design, which means that we used an embedded qualitative multimethod design (CRESWELL & PLANO CLARK, 2017). [1]

Visual research methods are receiving more attention in the social sciences and international mixed methods literature. They can be employed by researchers to examine additional objective and subjective aspects of people's lives and to go beyond the limitations of verbal and textual data or of discursive communication. As I regard all methods as both privileged and constrained, I will elaborate the strengths and limitations of timelines and genograms in comparison to narrative family interviews, explain why we integrated them, and discuss how we used them for the purposes of comparison, mutual compensation, or complementarity. We did this primarily during data analysis, but I will also briefly touch upon their potential to help us reflect on sampling issues and to stimulate further narrations during data collection. Moreover, I illustrate our methodological arguments with empirical examples from our research project. [2]

While many qualitative researchers apply multiple methods, not all use the term "multimethod" or concern themselves with the mixed methods literature. In this article, I will reflect on our qualitative multimethod design referring to notations, terminologies, concepts, and visual tools that researchers use within the mixed methods and multimethod research (MMMR) discourse, which is informed by and overlaps with the triangulation discourse. My contemplation of different purposes of integration as well as of different roles, special foci, and analytical options of visual methods in comparison to the frequently used narrative interview, may provide new insights and present further opportunities for reflecting, explicating, and planning different combinations of qualitative methods. Moreover, I introduce new possibilities for (visually) presenting qualitative designs which could be helpful for research proposals. [3]

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1 The project was funded by the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* [German Research Foundation] (DFG/395699309), conducted by Miriam SCHAD (Technical University Dortmund) and me, and directed by Nicole BURZAN at the Technical University Dortmund and Berthold VOGEL at the *Soziologisches Forschungsinstitut* [Sociological Research Institute] Göttingen (SOFI).

In our project, we examined individual and linked biographies of family members in the tradition of case reconstructive family research. Since reconstructive, interpretative, or hermeneutic multimethod approaches are underrepresented in MMMR discourse, my intention is to contribute to advancing this discourse by outlining special requirements for the presentation and practice of method integration. For example, in emergent and embedded designs, data collection and analytical processes are more closely integrated and procedures are more interactively and simultaneously linked than in other designs; and by choosing a case-reconstructive approach, the number of levels where comparisons are made during data analysis is increased. Moreover, systematic contemplation of the strengths and weaknesses of narrative interviews (e.g., related to interviewees' levels of reflection, temporal references, or their compulsion to detail) is neglected in MMMR discourse. [4]

In Section 2, I introduce and visualize our research design, focusing on sampling, the complementary visual and verbal data collection, and transformations and comparisons between visual and verbal data during data analysis. In Section 3, the strengths and weaknesses of timelines, genograms, and narrative family interviews as well as the purpose of their integration are discussed in detail with reference to empirical examples. In Section 4, I conclude with a summary and an outlook. [5]

## **2. Embedded Qualitative Multimethod Design Combining Verbal and Visual Biographical Data**

In our research project, we analyzed how middle-class families maintain their social status across generations (HENSE & SCHAD, 2021, 2022; HENSE, SCHAD, BURZAN & VOGEL, 2023; SCHAD & BURZAN, 2018a, 2018b; SCHAD & HENSE, 2023). Our objective was to identify mentalities and cross-generational strategies (also pre-reflexive and embodied ones) and to explore complementary perspectives on individual and linked lives. This called for a reconstructive qualitative approach and implied that we had to consider complex relational as well as longitudinal perspectives. In *case reconstructive family research*, the use of genograms and observation protocols is common and usually integrated into and interrelated with verbal data collection (HILDENBRAND, 2005).<sup>2</sup> We combined narrative family interviews conducted with members of three generations (verbal data collection) with graphic elicitation of biographies and family relationships by means of timelines and genograms (visual data collection). The resulting qualitative multimethod design is explained below. [6]

MMMR designs are usually differentiated on the basis of three criteria: 1. the *priority* of the different (qualitative and / or quantitative) research strands, 2. their *temporal order*, and 3. their *point(s) of integration* (for different approaches to designing research see: CRESWELL & PLANO CLARK, 2017; GREENE, 2007; MAXWELL & LOOMIS, 2003; MORSE & NIEHAUS, 2009; PLANO CLARK & IVANKOVA, 2016; PLOWRIGHT, 2011; SCHOONENBOOM & JOHNSON, 2017;

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2 For empirical examples of this German research approach in English: BOHLER and HILDENBRAND (1990), HILDENBRAND (1989).

TEDDLIE & TASHAKKORI, 2009; for various empirical examples see: BAUR, KELLE & KUCKARTZ, 2017; HESSE-BIBER & JOHNSON, 2015; PLANO CLARK & CRESWELL, 2008; TASHAKKORI & TEDDLIE, 2003, 2010). Qualitative-driven multimethod approaches—and especially reconstructive, interpretative, or hermeneutic ones (CREAMER, 2022; PELTO, 2017)—are underrepresented in MMMR discourse. With regard to the three criteria, we opted for a qualitative multimethod design with a verbal and a visual strand, each with equal priority. Since verbal and visual data collection was integrated and interrelated in this approach and the combined methods were embedded within a larger case study design, we used an embedded research design (CRESWELL & PLANO CLARK, 2017). This differs from other designs with a clear parallel (but not so closely connected) or sequential temporal ordering of their strands. There were several points of integration during data collection, processing, analysis, and interpretation in order to triangulate data and findings (DENZIN, 1970, 2012; FLICK, 2007, 2011; KELLE, 2001, 2008). Analyzing people at the collective level of families gave rise to specific challenges during integration procedures as we had to conduct within-individual, within-case (interrelating family members), and across-case comparisons. To provide a quick overview, a visualization of our design is shown in Figure 1 (other examples of visualizing MMMR designs: FETTERS, CURRY & CRESWELL, 2013; IVANKOVA, CRESWELL & STICK, 2006; SHANNON-BAKER & EDWARDS, 2018; VON DER LIPPE, 2010).

Figure 1: Embedded qualitative multimethod design combining verbal and visual biographical data of three-generation families to explore complementary perspectives on individual and linked lives. Click [here](#) to download the PDF file. [7]

MORSE's (1991, 2003) notation system has become the standard for the formal representation of MMMR designs: Qualitative research strands are represented as *qual* and quantitative strands as *quan*. If these words are lower case, then this strand has been given lower priority than the dominant, capitalized one(s). If researchers regard all strands as equal, all are capitalized. Since verbal and visual data were equally important for us, both qualitative strands are capitalized in Figure 1 as verbal QUAL and visual QUAL data. [8]

Before I explain our design in more detail, it is necessary to highlight an important aspect of designing research that is especially relevant for qualitative projects but not often considered in visualizations of MMMR designs: the *emergent way of approaching research*. This means that many design decisions cannot be completely planned in advance (like sampling and integration procedures). Moreover, researchers should be aware of not imposing too many (time) restrictions on their research process in order to be able to adjust design decisions in response to the field or new insights from data analysis or scientific exchange. I have added some of these emergent components to my visualization in Figure 1 (marked in gray). These include transforming face-to-face elicitation into online formats due to the Covid-19 pandemic, replacing a biographical questionnaire with timelines due to ongoing scientific exchange, or the anticipated emergence of sampling and integration processes. I suggest to expand the

conventions for visualizing MMMR designs accordingly in order to better account for qualitative approaches. [9]

## 2.1 Complex sampling structure to gain multi-perspectivity

Since we intended to analyze intergenerational status maintenance strategies in family settings, families were our cases. In the purposive, *multilevel case selection*, we selected typical occupational fields representing three different historical elements of the middle class as the first level (SCHÄFER, 2009). Then we sampled families within the occupational groups and followed a "doing family" approach (JURCZYK, LANGE & THIESSEN, 2014), which meant that we left it up to the families to define who they considered family, as long as three generations were included. Therefore, the third selection process took place within the family and was largely outside our control (HENSE & SCHAD, 2019). In Section 3.2, I will show how we used genograms to detect some of the inner-family selection processes. In accord with theoretical sampling (GLASER & STRAUSS, 1967; SCHÜTZE, 1983), we did not impose a sampling quota and instead decided iteratively whom to interview next in response to the ongoing data analysis. [10]

HILDENBRAND (2011) claimed that one can only fully grasp an individual socialization history by reconstructing three generations of a family. He also argued that three generations are enough (FUNCKE & HILDENBRAND, 2018), because this suffices to achieve theoretical saturation (BERTAUX & BERTAUX-WIAME, 1991). Therefore, we interviewed mostly *three generations* of a family (grandparents, parents, children) simultaneously, which meant three to eight people, depending on family constellation and their willingness and ability to participate in the family interview. [11]

Although due to Covid-19 restrictions we were unable to continue engaging in direct face-to-face exchanges, we were able to adapt narrative family interviews to online formats. For middle-class families, this modification did not pose major problems and even made it easier for us to access geographically dispersed families. In order to examine impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, we also changed our original sampling decisions to include follow-up interviews with those families we interviewed before April 2020. In sum, we conducted 30 interviews (19 initial and 11 follow-up) and interviewed 15 different families and 4 individuals (about their families). [12]

## 2.2 Complementary verbal and visual data collection during narrative family interviews

As FIELDING and SCHREIER (2001) pointed out, when researchers use diverse methods they generate the object of research in a specific way and measure different aspects of the research phenomenon (see also ALBER, GRIESE & SCHIEBEL, 2018; BURZAN, 2016; FIELDING, 2012; FIELDING & FIELDING, 1986; FLICK, 1992; KELLE, 2014; KUCKARTZ, 2014; SILVERMAN, 1985). DENZIN, referring to FLICK (2007), formulated the purpose of triangulation as follows:

"Objective reality can never be captured. We only know a thing through its representations. ... The combination of multiple methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives, and observers in a single study is best understood as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry" (DENZIN, 2012, p.82). [13]

Being more discerning about data and derived findings implies the need to reflect on what one actually wants to investigate and what are the appropriate ways of doing so. It is therefore important to first consider the perspectivity of each method *in comparison* to other methods (see Table 1).<sup>3</sup> Second, researchers have to decide which method they favor or which ones they want to combine due to their specific perspectives on the object of research.

	<b>Narrative Family Interview</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Genogram</b>
<b>Role Within the Research Design</b>	Recording intergenerationally-related biographies, intergenerational relationships	Complementing the <i>longitudinal</i> research perspective: analysis of (intergenerationally-related) biographies	Complementing the <i>relational</i> research perspective: analysis of intergenerational relationships
<b>Special Focus of Each Method</b>	<i>Narrations</i> of family members' biographies, observation of (non)verbal <i>family communication</i>	Selection and chronological organization of important / formative <i>events</i> in their life courses (intra-family comparisons of individual timelines)	Visualization of <i>family relationships</i> (also to non-interviewees) at a certain point in time
<b>Analytical Options</b>	Reconstruction of <i>family narratives</i> and history, <i>self-representation</i> , family roles, consensus, conflicts, interactive creation of meaning etc.	Comparisons of different or similar <i>life decisions</i> as well as the overall form of the life courses	Reconstruction of specific (e.g., problematic / harmonic) <i>family constellations</i> , roles

Table 1: Complementary perspectives on individual and linked lives [14]

As already mentioned, we intended to explore complementary perspectives on individual and linked lives and to identify family mentalities and cross-generational status maintenance strategies in middle-class families. With *narrative family*

<sup>3</sup> In my view, this comparative perspective, which is implicit in the requirement of object adequacy, is often overlooked, because we are used to researching in a certain way—the dominant, almost self-evident reference to verbal data is valid for qualitative as well as for quantitative social research (MRUCK & MEY, 2000).

*interviews*,<sup>4</sup> we were able to consider these aspects through an open approach to intergenerationally-related biographies as well as intergenerational relationships. As I will outline in more detail below, narrations of family members' biographies are produced during the interview, and (non)verbal family communication can be observed. Both can be used to reconstruct family narratives and histories, family roles, consensus, conflicts, and, among other things, the interactive creation of meaning. To deepen longitudinal and relational research perspectives, we added timelines and genograms to the interview setting. *Timelines* were used to support the longitudinal analysis of biographies and are discussed in more detail in Section 3.1 where I explain how we used the verbal and visual elicitation of biographies for the purposes of mutual compensation or complementarity. Collecting data visually with timelines implies focusing on important or formative events (instead of narrations) that are selected, linked to other events, and chronologically organized by the interviewees according to their subjective perceptions of these events. Comparing the individual timelines within a family helps researchers to discover divergences and similarities between prior life decisions as well as the overall form of the life courses. *Genograms* were used to support the relational analysis of intergenerational relationships, and in Section 3.2 I describe how we used the verbal and visual elicitation of family relationships for the purposes of comparison, mutual compensation, or complementarity. The visualization of relationships in terms of partnerships, parenthood, occupation, and lifetime in the form of a genogram also includes family members who were absent during the interview, thus providing an expanded view on family relationships. Comparing the different generations helps researchers to discover different family constellations and roles and to compare them with family narratives and communication. [15]

Data collection took place between August 2018 and 2021 in different settings, mainly in private households or at workplaces (and after April 2020 mostly online). Due to this embedding in social environments, we were able to analyze interviewees' reactions to interruptions to derive further insights into family relations (FREEMAN, BUTTERY & VAN HEEZIK, 2021). The *narrative family interviews* usually lasted three to four hours and even the follow-up interviews took between one and two hours. In general, the family member(s) from the oldest generation began by narrating their individual biographies, covering educational and working history as well as family formation. During the course of the interview every family member related their biography, and since family members were interviewed simultaneously, they reacted and interacted during data collection. In our view this is the greatest advantage of family interviews if members are interviewed together, compared to individual interviews (AUDEHM & ZIRFAS, 2001; BURZAN, 2020; HILDENBRAND & JAHN, 1988; PRZYBORSKI & WOHLRAB-SAHR, 2010; SCHIEK, 2017; SCHIEK, ULLRICH & BLOME, 2019; WIMBAUER & MOTAKEF, 2017a, 2017b; WOHLRAB-SAHR, 2005). [16]

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4 HILDENBRAND (2005) called this verbal elicitation method *familiengeschichtliches Gespräch* [family history conversation]. Since the narrative character of these interviews is not evident from the designation *familiengeschichtliches Gespräch* (at least not in German), we called them *narrative family interviews*. This also corresponded to our interview practice. Moreover, PRZYBORSKI and WOHLRAB-SAHR (2010), BEHNKE and MEUSER (2013) as well as WIMBAUER and MOTAKEF (2017a) used similar terms for their family or couple interviews.



Since interviewees communicated with each other verbally and non-verbally in the interview situation, they presented themselves in their respective family roles and as a family. In addition to the interviewers' narrative-stimulating questions, family members also questioned and commented on each other's narrations. Consequently, consensus or conflicts were expressed, and we were also able to identify intra-familial power configurations (RECZEK, 2014). Thus, intended as well as latent self-presentations and collective community production became observable. Furthermore, due to this interview setting we were able to analyze the (interactive) creation of meaning and how it influences and is influenced by the interaction between family members, the collective reconstruction of family narratives and history (collective identities) as well as family communication and non-verbal interaction. Although we did not observe the family members in their everyday life, we observed some of their practices and were able to link this information to their stories about their practices as well as some consequences in the form of life events (best observed using timelines and genograms). [17]

Initially, we concluded the interview with a *short biographical questionnaire* to collect objective data on events sometimes not mentioned during narrative interviews, but necessary for interpreting the objective life histories (in contrast to narrated life stories: ROSENTHAL, 1995). This questionnaire consisted of standardized questions with open answer options to collect information on: year of birth, marital status, number and age of children, highest educational and professional qualifications as well as first, last, and current occupation. To symbolize this semi-standardized data collection, I used the designation (*quan*) in Figure 1. We replaced the short questionnaire with timelines after other researchers brought this instrument to our attention. We could see that we did not lose any information by doing so, but instead could collect more data on life courses (see Section 3.1, where illustrations and further explications of timelines can be found). [18]

Another emergent component of our design was the *transformation of our interview setting*: Initially, the interviews took place face-to-face and then were transferred to an online format after April 2020.<sup>5</sup> When the interview was a face-to-face event, genograms and timelines were completed at the end, with the advantage that the interviewers were able to assist and record the process. Since we usually conducted the interviews in pairs, one interviewer was always able to observe and note the interview situation, the interviewees and their non-verbal reactions and interactions as well as the surroundings during data collection. These observations, which also included notes regarding theoretical and methodological follow-up questions (e.g., further sampling, ambiguities), were written up by both interviewers immediately after the interview. After transforming the family interview to an online format, we were only able to observe those interactions that were visible in a video conference. Thus, we were prevented from observing the environment as well as direct and simultaneous interactions among those participants who were physically present. Moreover, the family

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5 As a result, we have gained new insights into the possibilities of online research and can also reflect on changes regarding interviewers' and interviewees' interaction, the observation of the interview situation, and visual data collection.

members had to create their timelines and the joint family genogram by themselves. This required more detailed written explanations, a more complicated return procedure, and prevented us from observing and recording the creation processes. [19]

### 2.3 Transformations and connections between visual and verbal data during analysis

As can be seen in Figure 1, we combined 1. verbal and visual elicitation methods, 2. verbal and visual products (e.g., interview transcripts, field notes, visual representations of timelines and genograms) generated during data processing, and 3. different ways of merging the results through analytical procedures (for more information on integration issues: BAZELEY, 2018; KUCKARTZ, 2017; ONWUEGBUZIE & JOHNSON, 2021). We not only integrated findings in the final phase of the research process but also interrelated different elements throughout the process (e.g., data collection and analysis through theoretical sampling). The single arrows in Figure 1 indicate which data were transformed into other formats (e.g., verbal interviews into transcripts and then into a sequencing of the thematic/interactional structure of the family interview). Double arrows symbolize which data were juxtaposed during data analysis for the purposes of comparison, mutual compensation, or complementarity, as I explain in Section 3.<sup>6</sup> [20]

Turning to the verbal and visual products generated during data processing, I would like to highlight the interesting point that verbal data collection does not automatically entail a verbal form of data processing. The same is true for visual data collection and processing. As can be seen on the left-hand side of Figure 1, we transformed the recorded narrative family interview into a verbal transcript. Thereafter, we used this text to sequence the interview verbally by identifying the thematic and interactional structure of the interview (BOHNSACK, 2014; ROSENTHAL, 2018). In addition (represented in Figure 1 with +) to this verbal data processing, we also created *visual* representations of interviewees' life courses to prepare the data for the ensuing analysis of the objective life histories (ROSENTHAL, 1995, 2018). To do so, we collected all significant life events of all family members mentioned in the interview, the genogram, or the timelines as well as (if known) their timing and sequencing. [21]

Similarly, the data gathered with the help of visual elicitation methods were also transformed into visual as well as verbal products during data processing (right-hand side of Figure 1). The information from the observations was transformed into a written text format (interview protocols and field notes), which were later used to reflect and complement the reconstruction of the narrated life stories. This means visual data collection resulted in *verbal* data products. Nevertheless,

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6 As this special issue also serves as a communication medium between different research traditions, I would like to point out that different types of joint display can also be used to interrelate findings from different perspectives (e.g., FETTERS & GUETTERMAN, 2021; KUCKARTZ, 2017; SCHOONENBOOM & JOHNSON, 2021). We have found that visually displaying the most important findings not only serves dissemination but can also be used to reflect on different findings during data analysis and to derive hypotheses about their complementarities, contradictions, similarities, and ambiguities.

the other preparations of the visual data remained visual. While we did not alter (but anonymized) the timelines that family members generated themselves, we did edit the genograms that were produced during the interview. This was necessary because some gaps could be filled with information from the interview. Moreover, substituting the hand-written genogram with computer-generated versions facilitated anonymization as well as analysis. [22]

The main difference between narrated life stories and objective life histories that is central for biographical case reconstruction is their perspective on biographies (ROSENTHAL, 1995). While narrated life stories are used to reconstruct the narrators' present, subjective perspectives on their biographies, objective life histories and the analysis of life events are used to reconstruct life decisions and the implications that can be derived from these specific circumstances (ROSENTHAL, 2004, 2018; ROSENTHAL & FISCHER-ROSENTHAL, 2004; ROSENTHAL & WORM, 2018). Because we focused on multigenerational families and not individuals, our focus was on *within-case* comparisons (of the different family members) and not primarily on the within-individual comparisons of individual life histories and stories. Nevertheless, we found both comparative perspectives helpful for reconstructing the cases. It is crucial for this type of data analysis that cross-case comparisons are made *after* the individual cases have been fully reconstructed (EISEWICHT, 2018; FUNCKE & LOER, 2019; HILDENBRAND, 2005; ROSENTHAL, 2004, 2018). [23]

### **3. Strengths and Weaknesses of Narrative Family Interviews, Timelines, and Genograms and Our Purpose of Integration**

Much has happened since MRUCK and MEY (2000) diagnosed qualitative researchers' self-limitation to verbal data and textual documents, e.g., in the *FQS* special issues on visual methods (KNOBLAUCH, BAER, LAURIER, PETSCHKE & SCHNETTLER, 2008), on performative social science (JONES et al., 2008) or on analyzing narratives across media (ELLIOTT & SQUIRE, 2017). Nevertheless, the predominance of verbal data during data collection, processing, and analysis still holds. In my research, I have also focused mostly on verbal data to date, but am convinced that visual instruments are additional powerful tools that can complement verbal data collection and analysis (GRADY, 2008; MANNAY, 2016; PAUWELS, 2010; PROSSER & LOXLEY, 2008; ROSE, 2016; SHANNON-BAKER & EDWARDS, 2018; SPENCER, 2010). All these different visual approaches are employed by researchers with the aim of *going beyond* the limitations of verbal and textual data or of discursive communication. "The broad spectrum of approaches to narratives and narrative methods in research across disciplines and cultures ... has increased the number of ways in which knowledge can be obtained from a variety of modalities beyond spoken and written narratives" (ESIN & SQUIRE, 2013, §1). Respondents can use visual, creative, or aesthetic expressions to explore or to express meanings and knowledge that could not be accessed or expressed (in a similar way, as easily, or at all) with words (BAGNOLI, 2009). Visual methods can thus be employed to open up new perspectives on the subject of research and to exploit new forms of experience for researchers and respondents. Due to the diverse nature of reflection,

respondents access their experiences differently, facilitating further personal insight, and allowing researchers to see how people reflect on their lives in different ways. [24]

In the social sciences, visual methods mainly encompass photography, video, and graphic representations. We focus on graphic elicitation and the collection of *life courses* with timelines as well as the collection of *family relationships* with genograms. Both provide additional insights into representations of individual and linked lives and can differ from the narrated biographies and family communication recorded in the family interviews (see Table 1). Overall, we used visual methods to support *longitudinal analysis* of biographies as well as *relational analysis* of generational relationships within a narrative interview setting.

"It is worth making explicit that accepting the case for interrelating data from different sources is to accept a relativistic epistemology, one that justifies the value of knowledge from many sources, rather than to elevate one source of knowledge ... Those taking an approach favourable to triangulation ... are more likely to regard all methods as both privileged and constrained: the qualities that allow one kind of information to be collected and understood close off other kinds of information" (FIELDING & SCHREIER, 2001, §50). [25]

Building on Table 1, which shows the differences in how we and respondents reflected on our research topic using these methods, I now elaborate on the strengths and weaknesses of these methods and discuss how we employed them for the purposes of comparison, mutual compensation, or complementarity (BRYMAN, 2006; GREENE, CARACELLI & GRAHAM, 1989). Compared to more artistically oriented visual or arts-based methods (BARONE & EISNER, 2012; KNOWLES & COLE, 2008; ROLLING, 2013; SCHREIER, 2017), timelines and genograms are more scientific and analytically oriented. Utilizing timelines gives respondents more individual design freedom than genograms because a symbolic language and formal guidelines have been developed for the latter (HILDENBRAND, 2011). [26]

### **3.1 The timeline: A method to discover central elements structuring life courses**

Using timelines when conducting qualitative interviews gives interviewees the opportunity to report what they consider to be *important or formative events* in their life courses and to organize them chronologically and according to their subjective perceptions of these events (ADRIANSEN, 2012; BAGNOLI, 2009; BRIDGER, 2013; SCHULZE, 2017; SHERIDAN, CHAMBERLAIN & DUPUIS, 2011). This could be their birth, birth of siblings or children, entering into or separating from a partnership or friendship, school and vocational qualifications, professional activities, stays abroad, relocations, loss/death and so on. Although we started our timelines with the respondent's birth, in principle an earlier starting point is also possible (depending on the research question and the need to collect prenatal formative events), as is extending the observation period into the future (BAGNOLI, 2009). [27]

Although subjectively important life events are also reported during narrative interviews, this verbal method is constrained to the serial form of verbal language and by its "compulsion to detail" (SCHÜTZE, 1976, p.224)<sup>7</sup>, which means that event reporting in narrative interviews is accompanied by rich descriptions and explanations so the listener can better understand the main (causal) motivations as well as the processes and situations. In contrast, timelines are constrained to chronologically pre-structured sequences and a reflexive form of representing a life that leaves little room for accessing and expressing latent meanings and knowledge. Table 2 illustrates these weaknesses of both methods, but contrasts each with the strengths of the other method, which we were able to use for *mutually compensating* gaps or omissions in the temporal order and the different levels of reflection associated with these methods. Moreover, as shown in Table 2 and explained below, both a general overview of central structures and developments in life courses (best reflected in timelines), and a deeper understanding of the events and their genesis (best explored with narrative interviews) are needed to arrive at a *complementary understanding* of longitudinal biographical data.

	<b>Narrative Family Interview</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Purpose of Integration</b>
<b>Temporal Order</b>	Constraint: <i>serial</i> form of verbal language	Strengths: possibility to express simultaneity of different events and to link data in <i>simultaneous and consecutive ways</i> , multi-textual (shows different stories and different relations between events)	Compensation (analysis)
	Strengths: <i>recursive, circular</i> references, and <i>jumps</i> between time points and scales are possible during the course of the interview	Constraint: <i>chronologically</i> pre-structured sequences	Compensation (analysis)

<sup>7</sup> All English translations from German texts are mine.

	<b>Narrative Family Interview</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Purpose of Integration</b>
<b>Relationship Between Overview and Depth</b>	<p>Constraint: verbal data is <i>too complex</i> to reveal a central structure at a glance</p> <p>Strengths: interviewees provide <i>details</i>, locate events in experiences and situations, identify actors within social processes</p>	<p>Strength: <i>selecting / setting</i> priorities helps to see the (subjectively) most important events and interrelations: <i>overview</i> of the central formative elements of life courses</p>	Complementarity (analysis)
<b>Relationship Between Structures and Processes</b>	<p>Strengths: narratives help to understand how and why the events are connected (<i>genesis of events</i>) and help to reflect <i>processes</i></p>	<p>Strengths: focused on chains of completed events and lived life, helps to reflect <i>structures</i> (opportunity structures, complex temporal and relational references, and overall form of the life course)</p>	Complementarity (analysis)
<b>Levels of Reflection</b>	<p>Strength: possibility to also express <i>latent meanings and practices</i> in narrations, researchers can use this when reconstructing the interviewees' attitude toward looking at or presenting their own lives</p>	<p>Constraint: <i>reflexive</i> form of elicitation, researchers can only study the interviewees' reflexive form of representing their lives</p>	Compensation (analysis)

Table 2: Strengths and weaknesses of narrative family interviews and timelines as well as purpose of their integration [28]

Regarding the first aspect from Table 2, the *temporal order*, two different perspectives are to be distinguished: the possibility of expressing simultaneity of different events (strength of timelines) and the possibility of jumping between time points and expressing recursive or circular understandings of time (strengths of narrative interviews). While narrations are constrained to the serial form of verbal language, timeline data can be linked in simultaneous and consecutive ways, giving respondents and researchers the opportunity to reflect on *different*

*temporal patterns of coincidences or mutual influence* during data collection and analysis. Therefore, "the visual representation allows a number of stories to be told along the same line and provides space for multiple representations instead of a singular language" (ADRIANSEN, 2012, p.52). In this sense, timelines can be seen as a comprehensive, "multi-textual" (re)presentation of people's lives (SHERIDAN et al., 2011, p.565). Accordingly, the temporal complexity of the structure of lived experiences is best expressed in a visual representation, and we used the timelines to compensate for the serial form of verbal language. Nevertheless, creating a timeline means placing events in chronologically pre-structured sequences. Although this is only an organizing principle, researchers foster a linear view of the life course (BAGNOLI, 2009; SHERIDAN et al., 2011), whereas in narrative interviews respondents can take *different approaches to time*. The single narratives also follow a chronological order, but in the course of the interview, experiences from different points in time are related to each other or arranged in a way that makes sense to the respondents when talking about their own lives. Therefore, interviewees' use of recursive or circular temporal references helps the researchers to discover further connections, compensating for the chronological limitations of the timelines. Before I consider the next points of Table 2 in more detail, I will illustrate these methodological arguments with an empirical example (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Timeline (respondent generated) by a member of the third generation (female engineer), including the future (dashed line), translated and anonymized. Click [here](#) to download the PDF file. [29]

It can be seen in Figure 2 that the engineer used the multi-textual options of timelines and told different stories about her private and professional life, for example how spatial mobility is important to her: On the one hand, she experienced her parents' spatial mobility as a negative uprooting (away from kindergarten friends). On the other hand, spatial mobility and traveling are subjectively important in her private and professional life in order to gain new insights and to make, demonstrate, and perform important life decisions (e.g., finding a partner, family formation). Therefore, it is not surprising that she connected her future timeline to relocation and an extended stay abroad. Furthermore, she reflected on different temporal patterns of coincidence or mutual influence, turning points, and highlights: The timeline shows at a glance that she perceived the years between 2017 and 2020 as dense, with many important life events occurring simultaneously or in quick succession. She highlighted continuity and turning points in her *timeline* and especially demonstrated which life events were the most important from her present point of view. As a young mother, the birth of her son was the most important highlight in her life so far, followed (recursively) by her decision to start a family and getting to know her husband, which appear equally important for her and are the preconditions for her motherhood. In addition, becoming a mother was a decisive life event as it raised questions about her professional and personal reorientation. This insight into how the interviewee perceived the shape of her life could not have been achieved so quickly with interviews. In contrast, she used the interview to link childhood experiences to her current experiences and to make various

references to events in her family members' lives which occurred at different times but were aligned with each other and are not visible in her timeline. [30]

The second methodological difference between timelines and narrative interviews (see Table 2) therefore lies in their potential to *provide an overview* (strength of timelines) *or in-depth understanding* (strength of narrative interviews). Due to interviewees' "compulsion to detail" (SCHÜTZE, 1976, p.224) and the complexity of this type of verbal data, it is harder to extract the *central formative elements of life courses at a glance* (without elaborate sequential analyses<sup>8</sup>) from narrative interviews and make them visible. Since composing a visual representation necessitates making selections, respondents are encouraged to reflect on the meaning and importance of events and to express their priorities regarding the (subjectively) most important events and interrelations (BAGNOLI, 2009). This gives researchers and respondents a general overview and can be used by both researchers and interviewees for reflections and further interviewing. However, this focus has the disadvantage that many *details about these events* that come up during interviews and led us to form our understanding of a life path are not expressed and reflected in timelines. These include locating events in concrete experiences, practices, and situations, relating them to feelings or identifying the relevant actors. Furthermore, respondents often have the pattern of a curriculum vitae in mind when creating a timeline so that failures, aborted or non-institutionalized events are less likely to be revealed while they are more likely to be integrated into narratives. Therefore, timelines suggest an unrealistic clarity of the lived life due to abstraction (e.g., they can show breaks, but no ambiguities). Because we gain different insights into narrated and visualized biographies that complement each other, we combined the results of narrative interviews and timelines to arrive at a complementary understanding of a life path. [31]

The third methodological distinction between the two methods (see Table 2) is based on the previous arguments and concerns their different ways of *reflecting structures* (strength of timelines) *or processes* (strength of narrative interviews). We used timelines to discover the central structuring elements of life courses (temporal and relational structures, opportunity structures, overall form of a life course). Timelines comprise chains of completed events and thus can be considered a visualization of the lived life, which limits the options for the future life course. By analyzing these trajectories, *opportunity structures* can be reconstructed that were important structuring elements of life courses which respondents are not always aware of. This methodological approach was developed by ROSENTHAL (1995, 2018) for the analysis of objective life histories extracted from narrative interviews and can also be applied to the analysis of timelines. The identification and analysis of (concurrent and sequential) *temporal structures* (SHERIDAN et al., 2011) have already been discussed above. Moreover, timelines provide opportunities to explore *relational structures* and references because interviewees can relate different life events and link them with the wider familial, social, and political context (BAGNOLI, 2009). Finally, different subjectively perceived developments in the individual life course can be

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<sup>8</sup> For examples and guidance on different types of sequential analysis: ERHARD and SAMMET (2018), MAIWALD (2005), ROSENTHAL (2018).



shown so that the *overall form* or development of *life courses* becomes visible: As interviewees are able to interpret the events by drawing lines—including low points and highlights of their lives—as well as upward or downward movements or steady timelines, they express whether their life courses have developed in a linear or curvilinear fashion. This gives both interviewees and researchers the possibility to reflect on continuity, change, and turning points in the respondents' lives and those of their families, which are linked via similar events, but also through comparing the different timelines of a family. [32]

Focusing on the structures inherent in timelines leads to less reflection on the *processes that contributed to their formation*. But in this regard, narrative interviews can be considered as privileged because narratives help to understand how events come about and why they are connected. This is because event reporting, as explained earlier, is accompanied by extensive descriptions and explanations of processes, practices, its actors, and (causal) motivations. Furthermore, some practices like (non)verbal family communication can be observed during family interviews. Through the two methods' different foci on structures and processes, a complementary understanding of structuring elements and their developments is achieved by bringing these insights together during analysis.

Figure 3: Timeline (respondent generated) by a member of the first generation (female doctor), including the future (dashed line), translated and anonymized. Click [here](#) to download the PDF file. [33]

I will illustrate these methodological arguments with more empirical examples. The possibility to explore temporal structural elements with timelines has already been shown in Figure 2 that visualizes the general form of an engineer's life course and its temporal structuring elements (like highlights, turning points, continuity). A general upward trend as well as minor highlights can also be seen in a doctor's timeline (Figure 3). This timeline is further useful for illustrating opportunity structures and contextual or relational references. For example, in relating her life events she includes the social and political context, such as the Soviet invasion of Prague in 1968 or her participation in demonstrations and a spontaneous Stasi-dissolution team<sup>9</sup> in 1989 as expressions of her oppositional stance. Especially older interviewees link their private life to subjectively important political or historical contexts (other examples from our research are: being evacuated during World War II, a family member's death in a concentration camp). Analyzing these links in more detail can reveal more about their perspectives on life. Furthermore, in Figure 3 it can be seen how the doctor used the new opportunity structure after German reunification and the fall of communism for self-employment (establishing her own medical practice). Additionally, she links her life course with her wider familial context, including her parents' relocations in childhood, her roles as doctor, pastor's wife, and mother in

9 In the GDR, the Ministry for State Security was called "Stasi" which is an abbreviation for *Staatssicherheit* [state security]. The employees of the Ministry worked as a secret service and secret police and controlled the citizens of the GDR until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, which led to the reunification of Germany.

middle age, and the birth of grandchildren. Taking advantage of her new opportunity structures after retirement, her leisure (travels) as well as care activities (looking after grandchildren at her home or theirs) became more prominent in her later life. Although timelines show the most important events and their interrelations, the doctor's narration was necessary to understand how she organized her everyday life as a working mother and pastor's wife, how she practiced and experienced her oppositional role, and how her relationship with her parents developed, who (as convinced communists) pursued a socialist career and deliberately moved to the GDR to help build the new nation. Together with these details and complex information about processes and practices addressed in the interview, a complementary understanding of her life path was achieved during data analysis by combining the results of narrative interviews and timelines. [34]

The final methodological difference (see Table 2) that I would like to discuss are the different *levels of reflection* associated with narrative interviews and timelines (SHERIDAN et al., 2011). Timelines are constrained to a reflexive form of elicitation, and researchers can only examine this reflexive form of representing a life. In contrast, narrative interviews provide access to interviewees' *reflexive and pre-reflexive* knowledge structures (strength of narrative interviews). The latter are embedded in the narratives and can be reconstructed through sequential analysis (ROSENTHAL, 2018). Although interviewees are typically not aware of latent meanings and practices, narrative interviews provide possibilities for expressing these in narrations, and researchers can use this material when reconstructing the interviewees' attitude toward looking at or presenting their own lives. Therefore, the insights into pre-reflexive knowledge structures gained with narrative interviews can be used to compensate timelines' restriction to reflexive knowledge.

Figure 4: Timeline (respondent generated) by a member of the third generation (male skilled craftsman), translated and anonymized. Click [here](#) to download the PDF file. [35]

After more elaborate versions of timelines, it can be seen in Figure 4 that some reflexive forms of representing one's life remain simple.<sup>10</sup> With the help of the timeline it became immediately obvious that the death of the interviewee's father changed the intended path of his life course. Instead of going on to higher education after graduating from high school, he started an apprenticeship as a skilled craftsman in his deceased father's crafts business, although he had previously had little contact to the firm. His decision to quickly further qualify as a master craftsman as well as his interest in foreign countries and cultures correspond with his initial path towards higher education (and his position as one of two successors in the company). In addition, the analysis of the narrative interview and the examination of pre-reflective knowledge structures, for

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<sup>10</sup> Within-case comparison (between family members) can be used to identify similarities and differences between family members: In this family it became obvious that life courses are very similar across generations. This holds true for other skilled craft families and contrasts with some of the academic families in our study, which show greater individual differences in inter- and intragenerational comparisons.

example, revealed the interviewee's striving for social recognition and his need to legitimize his own position (to himself and to others). [36]

Finally, it should be noted that timelines and narrative interviews can also be *combined for the purpose of data collection*. Timelines can be used to deepen and enrich storytelling—especially because interviewees themselves might see different patterns of relationships with the help of timelining. We used them at the end of our family interviews and also recorded the comments and explanations while they were being drawn (for as long as face-to-face-interviews were possible). We would recommend this approach, because drawing a timeline stimulates further reflections. Furthermore, timelining can be considered a creative option for narrating life stories that can also be used when verbal expression is limited. Nevertheless, timelining is a reflexive research process, so respondents do need the appropriate reflexive, but not necessarily artistic skills for this graphic tool (ADRIANSEN, 2012; SHERIDAN et al., 2011). It is therefore not surprising that we did not receive any timelines back from certain interviewees after we were no longer able to assist them directly in the creation process due to the transformation of the interview setting to an online format. [37]

### **3.2 The genogram: A method to identify kinship relations and individual positioning**

A genogram is a visual, symbolic representation of multiple—in reconstructive family research at least three—generations of a family that is used to reconstruct couple as well as parent-child relationships (HILDENBRAND, 2005, 2011). Genograms are widely employed and methodologically well developed in case-reconstructive family research and family therapy contexts, using an established symbol system (BEUSHAUSEN, 2012; BUTLER, 2008; HILDENBRAND, 2011; LIEBERMAN, 1979; McGOLDRICK, GERSON & SHELLENBERGER, 1986). With this elicitation method, the entire family structure in terms of partnerships, parenthood, occupation, and lifetime can be visualized at a glance, including family members who were not present during the interview. From the second generation onwards, a genogram usually shows the merger of two families into a new family system based on a partnership (often marriage). [38]

We used genograms to support the *relational analysis* of intergenerational relationships and I will explain why we combined the verbal and visual elicitation of family relationships for the purposes of mutual compensation, complementarity, or comparison (see Table 3). The major *advantage of genograms* is that by using them we were able to systematically expand our focus to family members who were not present during the interview. We were able to capture their central kinship relations to those present and to collect the aforementioned information on them (so that we could compare this information with that of those who were present). We used the information in the genograms to help explain sample self-selection and to further our reflection on absent family members and, thus, to compensate for the corresponding constraints of narrative interviews. Moreover, we also used the genograms to help identify differences between family members who were present or absent, which we used to develop

hypotheses about family traditions and constellations or the respondents' location in family structures. These findings were compared with the results of the narrative interviews on family structures, traditions, and constellations with the aim of arriving at a complementary view or, through comparison, discovering commonalities or contradictions.

	<b>Narrative Family Interview</b>	<b>Genogram</b>	<b>Purpose of Integration</b>
<b>Family Composition</b>	Constraint: sample selection took place before the interview (only partly controlled by researchers)	Strength: <i>displays intra-family sample selection</i> (overall family structure includes non-interviewees)	Compensation (sampling)
<b>Relationship Between Structures and Processes</b>	Strengths: narratives help to understand how and why the family structures emerge and change ( <i>genesis</i> )	Strengths: visualization of family relationships, interviewees' <i>position</i> in the overall family structure helps to identify family <i>traditions and variations</i>	Complementarity (analysis)
<b>Relationship Between Overview and Depth</b>	Strengths: <i>interactions and communication</i> between family members are observable during the interview (roles, collective identities and variations)	Strengths: can be used to derive hypotheses about <i>relationship constellations</i> (closeness/distance, consensus/dissent) and respondents' <i>roles</i>	Comparison to discover commonalities, contradictions, and complementarity (analysis)
<b>Levels and Areas of Reflection</b>	Strength: possibility to express also <i>latent meanings and practices</i> in narrations	Constraint: reflection is bounded by a <i>highly pre-defined</i> structure	Compensation (analysis)
	Constraint: family constellations are mostly <i>reflected for the interviewees present</i>	Strengths: extending the research scope to <i>knowledge about absent</i> family members or even family taboos in a <i>reflective</i> manner	Compensation (data collection, analysis)

Table 3: Strengths and weaknesses of narrative family interviews and genograms as well as purpose of their integration [39]

In Table 3, I first explain how we changed our focus on looking at *family composition* through narrative interviews or genograms. Since we applied a *doing family* approach, leaving it up to the families to define who they considered family as long as three generations were included, we could only partly control inner-family sampling selection, which took place before interviewing (HENSE & SCHAD, 2019). This means that we did not observe the selection process during the interview where we focused mainly on the family members who were present and systematically lost sight of those who were absent. To compensate for this constraint of interviews, we used genograms to broaden our view on the family's composition and to see *who else belongs* to the family, to recognize immediately *who is still alive* and *to what extent the generations or individual family members differ* with regard to professional and family decisions (e.g., choice of profession, starting a family, marriage, or divorce). The complexity of the kinship structure and some relationship patterns (BEUSHAUSEN, 2012) sometimes only became apparent with the help of genograms. By comparing the composition of the interviewed family with the composition of the entire family visualized in a genogram, we were able to see, firstly, whether or to what extent those who were present differed systematically from those who were absent. Secondly, we used these insights to *reflect on sampling issues*: to explore self-recruitment and *doing family* among the interviewed family members, to potentially select additional family members, to directly ask about the reasons for absence or to reconstruct the reasons (like death, relationship ruptures, social alienation, spatial separation) using the entire data material, and to identify further sampling criteria for other families (assist theoretical sampling). This was necessary because our cases were families, which meant that we had to reflect whether the results of our family interviews were likely to apply to the whole family or only to parts of it. Therefore, it was important to find out whether inner-family sample selection was due to reasons related to the research question or not. For example, in one family those family members were absent who were described as particularly career-oriented and in this regard distinct from the interviewed part of the family. In general, other researchers have so far only compared findings from genograms and interviews at the level of data analysis, so that the use of genograms in reflecting on sampling decisions has, to the best of my knowledge, gone unrecognized or untapped until now.

Figure 5: Genogram of a "family of engineers," generated during the face-to-face family interview, digitized, supplemented by researchers, translated and anonymized. Click [here](#) to download the PDF file.

Figure 6: Genogram of a skilled craft family, generated during the face-to-face family interview, digitized, supplemented by researchers, translated and anonymized. Click [here](#) to download the PDF file. [40]

To illustrate these arguments, two genograms from our study are shown in Figures 5 and 6. In Figure 5, the genogram of a family is displayed in which the engineering profession has been practiced for generations. If we had considered only the family interview, in which primarily engineers participated (interviewed family members are marked by a thicker border around the circles or squares),

we would not have known about other family members' career choices that differed from engineering. In the first and second generation of this family there was a series of separations and divorces, which led to exclusion of some family members while others, like the second wife (Margret) and her daughter (Lea), had to be included into the family. As a result, former spouses and specific parts of the family were not present and were rarely mentioned during the interview. Figure 6 also illustrates that only Dieter's family line, which founded the skilled craft family business, participated in the interview, while his wife Juliana's line was not only physically absent, but also not addressed during the interview—although her brother also worked in the family business and their second daughter Marie followed a professional tradition of the maternal line (civil servant). [41]

The second and third methodological distinctions between the two methods (see Table 3) are similar to previous arguments made in Section 3.1 and concern their different ways of reflecting *structures* (strength of genograms) and *processes* (strength of narrative interviews) or their potential to provide an *overview* (strength of genograms) and *in-depth understanding* (strength of narrative interviews). In Section 3.1 I already explained that we discovered central temporal and relational structures related to the interviewees' life courses because they were *visualized* in timelines and that this helped us gain an overview on central formative events and relations. Similarly, and visible in the genograms in Figures 5 and 6, we could gain a quick overview of the close kinship relations and became aware of central structuring elements of intergenerational relationships due to their visualization. On the basis of this overview we were able to identify family traditions, constellations, and challenges as well as their variations between individual family members or generations. [42]

Before I go into these arguments in more detail, I would first like to highlight three *differences between timelines and genograms* regarding the visualization and analysis of structures in people's lives: First, we relied primarily on genograms for our relational analysis of family relationships, while timelines were primarily used for longitudinal analyses. Second, compared to timelines, the pre-defined structure of genograms is much more formalized and less open for individual design decisions so that there is little room for expressing individual emphases, meanings, and evaluations. Third, there is only one genogram per family showing family relations for the entire family (including non-interviewees), while the individual timelines of (the interviewed) family members had to be synthesized by within-case comparison during data analysis. [43]

Applying my methodological arguments to genograms in more detail (HILDENBRAND, 2011; SCHIERBAUM, 2017): Relevant objective *structures visible in genograms* (see Figures 5 and 6) are number of family members (in the different generations), relationship structures such as relations between partners, siblings, (grand)parents, and their descendants as well as broader and legal relationships (e.g., divorce, adoption), gender relations, age structures, temporal information on family changes (e.g., birth, death, separation) and choice of profession. We used these insights on the one hand to identify structural conditions in the families (our cases) and especially inter- and intragenerational

differences and similarities between family members. On the other hand, we used genograms to situate individual interviewees in the larger family and to discover their special challenges or particular position there. For example, conclusions can be drawn about some aspects relevant to the analysis of family structures such as family traditions (e.g., career choices, family division of labor, role models), family dynamics (e.g., development of partnerships and generative behavior), family issues (e.g., special challenges such as single parenthood, orphanhood, or more reconstructively elaborated relational constellations like closeness and distance, consensus, and dissent), and family resources (e.g., support options for career and family decisions, issues of distributing inheritances and care). [44]

Illustrations can be found in Figure 6: The genogram shows the family tradition of skilled craftspeople together with the family tradition of long-lasting marriages among the owners of the family business. The corresponding roles of master carpenter (role of the male owner) and bookkeeper (his wife's role) exist for the first and second generation and still have to be negotiated between the female successor and her husband in the third generation. Moreover, it is immediately apparent that many descendants (second generation) complicate the issue of business succession and that most of them work in the family business. These systematic overlaps between family and professional spheres can provide comprehensive opportunities (not always perceived as such) for family support in care work and professional life. [45]

In general, these relational structures can be seen better and more easily with genograms than with purely verbal interview data. Since a subjective selection of structural elements is reported during narrative interviews, the results from narrative interviews and genograms can be linked. If researchers concentrate on the inherent focus of genograms on overviews and structures, which is similar to that of timelines, this could lead them to shift their attention away from the process dimension and a deeper understanding of social processes (strengths of family interviews). Again, narrative interviews were useful for exploring how and why the family structures emerged and changed for individual family members during their life courses or intergenerationally for different generations. Moreover, interviewees shed light on other structural conditions in families or (family) relationships that cannot be captured with genograms (like contact opportunities) and revealed important aspects of family structures as they communicated, reacted, and interacted with each other during the family interview. By observing and interpreting the (non)verbal interactions during narrative family interviews, we could, for example, reconstruct family roles, collective identities, and their variations and compare these insights with the hypotheses that we derived from analyzing the genograms. [46]

To illustrate these arguments with our genograms: In Figure 5, complex family constellations are shown that result from separations and divorces. The family was presented with the challenge of integrating new family members or maintaining contact with old members. It can be seen that the daughter by marriage in the third generation (Lea), who thus has a special position in the family, decided to follow in her stepfather's (Martin) and her older stepbrothers'

(Felix, Thomas) professional footsteps and become an engineer. We derived the hypothesis that this was her way to integrate into the new family and this was supported by the family narratives. In addition, it became clear from the rich narratives and the communication behavior during the interview that professional exchange is a central theme in everyday life and family meetings, that being an engineer is part of the collective identity of this part of the family and that family members also advise each other on professional decisions with Martin taking a leadership role. In contrast, the daughters of Robert, who is Martin's brother, have chosen completely different professions. We assumed that there would be some distance between Robert's and Martin's descendants in the third generation, which was not supported by our interview data. Moreover, the interview data provided more in-depth information on the development of family relationships after separations. The benefit of the genogram for this analysis was to display at a glance the family challenge of integration. [47]

Overall and in respect to the second methodological argument on structures and processes (Table 3), the examples have shown that a *complementary understanding* of structuring elements and their developments was achieved by bringing together the insights gained by both methods during analysis. The same holds true for the third methodological argument concerning overview and depth. However, the matching of the results was much more open, as it was far more likely for us to discover *contradictions and commonalities* in addition to complementarities. This was especially due to the fact that we identified differences between family members on the basis of the visible family structures in genograms and used this to develop hypotheses about relationship constellations (like closeness-distance, consensus-dissent, center-periphery, or inclusion-exclusion), the respondents' roles, or typical family and individual decision-making patterns. These hypotheses were tested on the narrative data and were not always supported. In addition, contradictions were found, which required further re-analyses. [48]

The final methodological differences (see Table 3) that I would like to discuss are the different *levels of reflection* that we can access with narrative interviews or genograms. Like timelining, generating genograms is a reflexive research process requiring interviewer support—this was made clear by the fact that in the context of online interviews, there were families who were not able to create a genogram (with a template) on their own without assistance. There is less recourse to routine practices like storytelling when creating genograms and only in exceptional cases is there prior experience of creating them (for example from genealogy, or family therapy). As already mentioned, respondents' reflection is bounded by the highly pre-defined structure of genograms and an emphasis on institutionalized life events (such as attained professional position, marriage). Therefore, other relational constellations or interviewees' pre-reflexive knowledge structures are only accessible with the help of narrative interviews that were used to compensate for these disadvantages of genograms. [49]

The situation concerning the different *areas of reflection* is reversed: While in interviews the family relationships are mostly reflected just for those present, the



area of reflection is systematically extended to knowledge about absent family members when genograms are used. In many cases, this additional method provided valuable assistance to the interviewees in broadening their scope of reflection to the entire family. Following this prompt, they also reported, commented, and discussed even sensitive constellations in the family (such as separations, blended families, estrangements). In this way, knowledge stocks and gaps about closer kin (about whom much or little information was available) as well as family taboos became apparent. In one very concise case, for example, the adult son commented that this was the first time he had heard about his biological father's profession. Without genograms, these topics would not have come up because the interviewees would not have thought of them and the interviewers would not have known about them and therefore could not have actively addressed them. Thus, the extended area of reflection (strength of genograms) compensates for the narrower frame of reference in interviews during data analysis. It should be noted that this compensation can only be achieved if the methods are also strongly integrated at the *level of data collection*. We achieved this integration by using the collective creation of the genogram as an important narrative stimulus and recording the entire process.<sup>11</sup> [50]

#### 4. Conclusion and Outlook

Combining graphic elicitation (timelines, genograms) with verbal data collection (narrative family interviews) in an embedded qualitative multimethod design can potentially help researchers explore complementary perspectives on individual and linked lives as well as additional aspects of longitudinal biographical data (particularly timelines) and intergenerational relationships (particularly genograms). Furthermore, the strengths of each method can be used to compensate the limitations of others. Overall, I have shown the benefits of graphic forms of self-representation, which are less common than narrative or pictorial modalities (photo, video). [51]

Narrative data is firstly constrained by the serial form of verbal language which we compensated for with multi-textual visualizations. Secondly, the rich descriptions and explanations in narrative interviews (compulsion to detail) make it difficult to gain a quick overview of central structures like formative events during a life course or specific relationship constellations in the entire family (strengths of timelines and genograms due to the necessity to select relevant aspects for visualization). On the other hand, this detailed information is needed to explore (causal) motivations as well as processes and situations (strengths of narrative interviews)—which underlines that methods are sometimes both privileged and constrained for the same reasons. Therefore, with narrative interviews we are able to enhance our understanding of how and why life course-related events or family structures emerge and change—information that is largely lacking from timelines or genograms. Consequently, breadth and depth of

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<sup>11</sup> We drafted genograms at the end of our family interviews, because initial narrations should not be pre-structured by them and a certain relationship of trust is necessary to disclose complex and potentially conflictual family structures.

analysis is best achieved when verbal and visual data analyses are used to access and interrelate complementary perspectives on the object of research. [52]

Furthermore, narrative interviews also have systematic drawbacks when it comes to reflecting sampling issues. Inner-family selection processes took place before interviewing and during the interview we lost sight of absent family members. A major advantage of genograms is that we were able to systematically expand our focus to non-interviewed family members and record key information on them to compare it with that of the interviewed part of the family. This information helped us to explain sample self-selection and to extend our reflection on absent family members. However, both timelines and genograms are limited by their reflexive pre-structured form of elicitation, while in narrations interviewees are also able to express latent meanings and practices. Therefore, we used the methods for mutual compensation. Finally, the three methods can also be integrated during data collection as both timelines and genograms provide narrative stimuli. [53]

Due to space limitations, my explanations are limited and further in-depth discussions about integration practices are desirable (ALBER et al., 2018; FIELDING & FIELDING, 1986; FLICK 2007; KELLE & ERZBERGER, 1999), e.g., about interactions and comparisons during data collection and analysis, procedures for sequential analysis, triangulation as a challenge emerging from empirical practice, or dealing with contradictions. Based on my considerations, further reflection on the epistemological problem of how scientists (re)construct the object of their research through different methods is needed and how this also affects research questions, research processes, and results (ALBER et al., 2018; ELLIOTT & SQUIRE, 2017; FIELDING & SCHREIER, 2001; MANNAY, 2016; PROSSER & LOXLEY, 2008; ROSENTHAL, 1995). In addition, I also suggest further considering the recursive effects of interactive data collection on and by respondents as well as the connections between given forms of expression and subjective interpretations of experiences: How does the application of different methods affect the production of respondents' biographical constructions and how do the concepts inherent to the methods structure the perception and representation of their reality as well as their options for biographical self-representation? [54]

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