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3

Data Analysis

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

- feel confident as you first confront your data
- be familiar with three ways of analysing qualitative data: content analysis, grounded theory and narrative analysis
- know what is shared by all effective methods for analysing data.

If you are new to qualitative research, data analysis can be something of a mystery. You have gathered your interviews, selected your documents or made some observations. Now what do you do?

It appears to be so much easier in quantitative research. Your data usually present themselves as sets of numbers and there are readily available statistical tests which you can apply to see what your numbers 'mean'. This does not imply that your data analysis will be foolproof – you may use an inappropriate statistical test, misinterpret your findings and your primary data may be suspect. But at least you know where to begin.

By contrast, beginning qualitative data analysis can seem like exploring a new territory without an easy-to-read map. When you consult guidebooks, you find a host of competing approaches rather than what appears to be the settled consensus about what constitutes good quantitative research.

This means that, before you begin data analysis, it is crucial to be aware of the key approaches that have been used in qualitative research. Indeed, knowledge of such approaches is crucial in how you go about defining your research problem and reviewing the literature.

Explanations of three widely used approaches – **content analysis, grounded theory** and narrative analysis – will follow shortly, illustrated by case studies. However, before I bog you down with detail, I want to provide a short, simplified piece of advice, aimed at the novice. This advice does not directly draw upon any one approach or even very much of what has been written in previous textbooks. Instead, it is based on what I have learned through supervising students grappling with qualitative data. For simplicity's sake, my advice is formulated as a set of rules.

3.1 SOME RULES FOR DATA ANALYSIS

Here are six simple rules:

1 Get down to analysis as early as possible and avoid 'busy' work.
2 Try out different theoretical approaches; see what works for you (and for your data).
3 Avoid too early **hypotheses** and seek to see where your analysis is leading in order to establish an hypothesis.
4 Do not look for telling examples but analyse your data thoroughly and fairly.
5 Initially, focus on a small part of your data and analyse it intensively; there will be time later to test out your findings on your data set as a whole.
6 Try to focus on sequences (of talk, written material or interaction).

I will say some more about each of these rules. Much more detail will be found in Chapter 11 which sets out guidelines for you to use in evaluating other people's research.

3.1.1 Early analysis

It is a commonplace observation that people under stress may often postpone important or difficult tasks. Gathering qualitative data gives you several alibis which mask the fact that you have succumbed to such a temptation:

- Getting access to your data can take ages because of the time it takes to satisfy ethics committee and/or to get access to appropriate subjects or settings.
- Gathering your data can be very time consuming.
- Once you have your data, transcribing them all so that they are ready for analysis can take years.

The sad consequence of taking these facts too seriously is that you have very little, if any, time for data analysis itself. This applies even to PhD students with three or more

years to write their dissertation. So imagine how it leaves you as an undergraduate or MA student where start to finish time will, at best, be counted in months!

In fact, if you think sensibly from the start, each of these problems can be avoided. First, when you are designing your study, go for data which offer easy access and are quick to gather. Certain kinds of documents or Internet data are examples. Secondary analysis of other people's data is now much easier with online databanks in use (go to: www.data-archive.ac.uk/home).

Second, never think of transcribing all your material at the start. This is a sure way to delay data analysis. Instead, transcribe one or two examples and analyse those. You will then be in a far better position to decide how much of your material needs to be transcribed in full and how much can be transcribed at particular points of interest.

EXERCISE 3.1

Pick out any research topic that interests you. Then:

- Work out how you could obtain relevant data quickly and easily.
- Consider whether such data could satisfactorily address your original topic.

3.1.2 Try out different theoretical approaches

In reading qualitative research studies, you will speedily discover that authors routinely reference one or another theoretical approach as their point of departure. As Rapley puts it:

> Anyone new to qualitative analysis will be faced with a quandary: what should I do with all this data? You look at various journal articles, and often see the same key phrases again and again. People keep telling you they did 'grounded theory', or conducted a 'phenomenological analysis' and then give you various levels of details about what that did. Some are quite rich descriptions of things done to and with 'raw data'; others just use a couple of phrases and a single reference (often to the same small array of texts). Above all, whatever you read, you realise that it is *de rigeur* to have some kind of tag. You need the right kind of label in your methods section, ideally one that positions you as competent, so that your work can be nicely categorised. (2011: 273)

Rapley rightly injects a cynical note into his comments about theoretical orientations. Too often, labelling your research can be simply a kind of window dressing to obtain status among your peers. It is one thing to 'tag' your work; it is quite another to use theory thoroughly and well.

So why do you need theory when you do data analysis? The simple answer is that *any* analysis depends on the use of certain theory-dependent **concepts**. For instance, even if you claim to be merely reporting how your respondents 'see' things or how things 'are' in the field, I guarantee that you will tacitly be using an unacknowledged theoretical position about what kinds of entities are out there in the 'field'.

So there is no escape from theoretically defined conceptual description. For instance, it is dangerous to assume that the researcher's method of observing 'facts' and then trying to explain them is shared by participants. As Harvey Sacks has pointed out, in everyday life we determine what is a 'fact' by first seeing if there is some convincing explanation around. For instance, coroners may not deliver a verdict of suicide unless there is some evidence that the deceased person had a reason to take their own life (Sacks, 1992, I: 123). In that sense, in everyday life, only those 'facts' occur for which there is an explanation (I: 121).

Sacks made this observation by using a particular theoretical position deriving from **ethnomethodology** (see Section 1.8). Whatever theory you use, concepts will shape your research. Rapley, once again, makes the point:

> all [methods of data analysis] start with a close inspection of a sample of data about a specific issue. This close inspection is used to discover, explore and generate an increasingly refined conceptual description of the phenomena. The resulting conceptual description therefore emerges from, is based on, or is grounded in the data about the phenomena. (2011: 276)

TIP

In theoretically defined data analysis, one shifts the focus from:

> what is said by participants, what you've observed them doing or what you read in a text (the level of description and summary) to:
>
> exploring and explaining what is 'underlying' or to 'distil' essence, meaning, norms, orders, patterns, rules, structures etcetera (the level of concepts and themes). (Rapley, 2011: 276)

3.1.3 Avoid early hypotheses

A quick glance at a **sample** of quantitative research articles will show that they commonly contain a section entitled 'hypotheses tested'. Beginning with a hypothesis related to predefined **variables** makes a great deal of sense when you are using a statistical logic. By doing so, you avoid potentially 'sloppy' exploratory research and end up with credible correlations which shed light on your research problem.

By contrast, qualitative researchers usually need to explore the 'field' in depth before they can start to speculate about what elements are most relevant and how they might be related. This does not mean that the early stages of their research are purely descriptive (see Section 3.1.2). Even conceptually driven research needs close familiarity with what is going before it can construct hypotheses to be tested.

Take my research on HIV-test counselling (Silverman, 1997). I collected tapes of counselling sessions in a number of centres. In the context of the AIDS pandemic, it would have been tempting to test an early hypothesis about which centres and what counselling methods were most effective in preventing HIV transmission among their clients. However, this would have ignored tricky questions about what was actually happening in these counselling interviews. Such questions could not be answered by consulting the centres' officially stated philosophy or even the practices in which their counsellors were trained (see Silverman, 2010: 125–31). Instead, the hypotheses I eventually generated and then tested were based on detailed analysis of how counsellors and their clients actually communicated with each other.

CASE STUDY

In a study of HIV-test counselling (Silverman, 1997), I examined the relationship between the different formats used by counsellors to give advice and how the advice was received by their clients. Based on 50 advice sequences, I showed how personalised advice, offered after clients had been asked to specify their concerns, was associated with a 'marked acknowledgement' (e.g. a comment on the advice or a further question from the client). Conversely, counsellors who gave generalised advice, without first getting their clients to specify a particular problem, generally received only 'unmarked acknowledgements' (e.g. 'mm', 'right', 'yes').

However, the availability of detailed transcripts meant that I could go beyond this predictable finding. The problem was that, if asked, many counsellors would have recognised that generalised advice-giving is likely to be ineffective. So I generated and tested hypotheses about two *functions* of generalised advice-giving in HIV-test counselling:

- managing potentially disruptive minimal client uptakes by marking them as appropriate receipts to information-giving rather than advice-delivery
- speeding up the interview since advice did not need to be based on prior elicitation of clients' perspectives.

I sought, thereby, to make a constructive input into policy debates by examining the *functions* of communication sequences in a particular institutional context.

3.1.4 Avoid telling examples

An all too common way of reporting qualitative research findings is to present a slab of data (for instance, an interview transcript) prefaced with a comment like 'an interesting example of this is …'. To my mind, such use of materials works far better in, say, journalism than in scientific research. This is because journalists want to write lively stories with telling examples. They do not usually have the time, the space or the incentive to worry about whether their interpretation fits all their material.

By contrast, scientific research, whether quantitative or qualitative, must convince readers that the claims being made fit all the data and that negative instances have not been discounted. This involves actively searching for deviant cases to test emerging hypotheses and the use of the constant comparative method (see Chapter 11).

So, rather than using a few telling examples, one must seek to demonstrate that one's findings are robust even when subjected to the hardest of tests. This involves procedures described in Sections 3.1.5 and 3.1.6.

3.1.5 Focus initially on a small part of your data

As we saw in Section 3.1.1, early data analysis tends to be associated with good qualitative research. Because it usually needs to be carried out before all your data are available, this generally means that you will be seeking to analyse only a small part of your eventual data corpus.

However, even if you have all your data to hand (perhaps because you are doing secondary analysis of someone else's data), it makes sense to begin by trying to develop a detailed analysis of a very limited amount of data (**intensive analysis**). This should provide a good initial grasp of the phenomena with which you are concerned. These can then be tested by looking at relevant features of your whole data set (**extensive analysis**).

My counselling research followed exactly this pattern (Silverman, 1997; 2010: 125–31):

- At the start, I transcribed just a few counselling interviews which were analysed in depth.
- From such intensive analysis, I developed some provisional hypotheses about the patterns of communication between counsellors and their clients.
- I then transcribed parts of the other interviews that were relevant to these hypotheses.
- This material was then examined and my initial hypotheses revised accordingly.

3.1.6 Try to focus on sequences

One further reason why brief data extracts are usually unreliable is that they tend to pull out material from the sequences of actions in which they are embedded. So, for instance, it should be unacceptable for interview researchers to offer only an interviewee's comment without prefacing it with the interviewer's question, comment or response token (e.g. 'mm, mm') that preceded it, followed up with some attention to how the former shaped the latter. Just this issue arises later in this chapter when I compare grounded theory with narrative analysis.

In everyday life, we constantly attend to where an utterance is positioned in order to find its sense. For example, try saying 'hello' to someone half-way through a conversation! These are exactly the kinds of things that qualitative research has shown and it is incumbent upon good researchers to locate the sequences in which utterances and actions are embedded.

Two final comments about sequence are in order. The specialised approach of **conversation analysis** (CA) has been central to this argument about the relevance of sequence to action (see Section 9.4). However, this is not a veiled recommendation that the only way to do credible qualitative research is via CA. On the contrary, a range of qualitative approaches take on board the idea of sequence. And, long before CA, linguists recognised how meaning is always tied to the order in which things happen or are presented. For instance, think of how, when you are ordering a meal in a Western restaurant, the waiter will not expect you to order your dessert before your soup (see my discussion of Saussure in Section 10.4).

The second comment is that, of course, you must, at some point elect to narrow down the sequence on which you focus – otherwise you could only make observations about, say, one whole interview or document. However, at least try to retain the immediate surroundings of whatever data you are analysing. And bear in mind that there may well be evidence that the participants indicate to another where one part of their interaction is concluded and another is about to begin (in conversation, think of how we use such markers as 'turning to (another topic)' to move the agenda on, or 'as you say' to link our talk to what has preceded it).

TIP

Ultimately, the most satisfactory way to develop good research skills is through writing (see Chapter 12). As Rapley puts it:

(Continued)

(Continued)

> The practices of good (or even adequate) qualitative data analysis can never be adequately summed up by using a neat tag. They can also never be summed up by a list of specific steps or procedures that have been undertaken. Above all, you need to develop a working, hands-on, empirical, tacit knowledge of analysis. This should enable you to develop, what I can only think to call, 'a qualitative analytic attitude'. (2011: 274)

What Rapley calls 'a qualitative analytic attitude' is, in the final instance, more important than any set of rules. So use the rules I have just offered as a kind of ladder to give you access to the level at which qualitative researchers operate. Once you start to write up your research and become confident in what you are arguing, you can throw the ladder away.

As we have seen, there is no such thing as theory-free research. In the rest of this chapter, I want to explore three ways of exploring qualitative data:

- content analysis
- grounded theory
- narrative analysis.

These are just examples of how to analyse qualitative data. Later on in this book, I will discuss others (**discourse analysis** and conversation analysis in Chapter 9 and **semiotics** in Chapter 10).

I have deliberately not attempted to cover *every* approach as this would have produced a very long, indigestible chapter. At this stage, it is more important that you get some sense of the ways in which we can analyse qualitative data.

3.2 CONTENT ANALYSIS

Content analysis involves establishing categories and then counting the number of instances when those categories are used in a particular item of text, for instance a newspaper report. Because it is a very familiar method in quantitative research, it is important to distinguish how content analysis is used in qualitative studies.

Content analysis is an accepted method of **textual** investigation, particularly in the field of mass communications. In content analysis, researchers establish a set of categories and then count the number of instances that fall into each category. The crucial requirement is that the categories are sufficiently precise to enable different coders to arrive at the same results when the same body of material (e.g. newspaper

headlines) is examined (see Berelson, 1952). In this way, content analysis pays particular attention to the issue of the **reliability** of its measures – ensuring that different researchers use them in the same way – and to the **validity** of its findings – through precise counts of word use (see Selltiz et al., 1964: 335–42). Table 3.1 shows the sequence of steps involved in quantitative content analysis.

TABLE 3.1 Doing quantitative content analysis

1. Select particular texts relevant to your research problem
2. Sample texts if there are too many to analyse completely
3. Construct a coding frame (categorisation scheme) that fits both the theoretical considerations and the materials
4. Pilot and revise the coding frame and explicitly define the coding rules
5. Test the reliability of codes, and sensitise coders to ambiguities
6. Code all materials in the sample, and establish the overall reliability of the process
7. Set up a data file for the purpose of statistical analysis
8. Write a codebook including (a) the rationale of the coding frame; (b) the frequency distribution of all codes; and (c) the reliability of the coding process

Source: adapted from Bauer, 2000: 149 and Marvasti, 2004: 94

CASE STUDY
Bilingualism in Florida

Amir Marvasti gives an example of the use of this kind of content analysis in his study of newspaper content (Marvasti, 2004: 91–2). He was interested in South Floridians' attitudes towards bilingualism, which in this case referred to the official recognition and use of the Spanish language in addition to English. In 1980, a conservative political group in Dade County (a large municipality in South Florida with a sizeable Hispanic population) organised a referendum vote to declare the county officially monolingual. This 'English-only' proposal, which was eventually voted into law, was intended to reverse earlier legislation that had declared the area officially bilingual in 1973.

Marvasti's research question was: What is the public's rationale for supporting the anti-bilingual initiative? To collect data for his analysis, he went through the archives of a local newspaper, *The Miami Herald*, in search of editorials, letters to the editor and articles that argued in favour of the proposed law. In doing so, he unearthed the following kind of letter:

> The ordinance is not a hate thing ... The American, the English-speaking people would like to have this community back the way it was. They would like to have their language back. (South Florida resident: Marvasti, 2004: 91)

Thirty-five letters to the editor were then analysed in search of themes that Marvasti thought served as rhetorical explanations for supporting anti-bilingualism. These themes are displayed in Table 3.2.

TABLE 3.2 Classification of *Miami Herald* articles, editorials and letters to the editor published in 1980 in support of anti-bilingualism in Dade County, Florida

Theme	Example	Number	Percentage
Patriotism	To be *true* Americans immigrants must speak English	6	17%
Assimilation	America is a "melting pot" and English is the "common element"	11	31%
Polarization	Bilingualism polarizes members of society	5	14%
Voters' rights	Voters have the right to vote on anything they choose including anti-bilingualism	4	11%
Public nuisance	Immigrants who speak Spanish in public places disturb native English speakers	4	11%
Job discrimination	Employers might discriminate against English-only speakers by hiring bilinguals	3	9%
Non-official bilingualism	Bilingualism could exist, but it shouldn't be officially recognized	2	6%
		35	100%

Source: Marvasti, 2004: 92

Marvasti comments that his study:

> serves as an example of a very simple content analysis project aimed at revealing public opinion about a particular issue by summarizing related texts into explanatory categories. Using a small sample, it shows seven ways in which South Floridians accounted for their desire to make the area officially monolingual. (2004: 92)

Marvasti's newspaper study involved simple tabulations of instances of particular categories. Undoubtedly, content analysis has advantages for qualitative researchers. As Marvasti points out, the method offers 'convenience … in simplifying and reducing large amounts of data into organized segments' (2004: 91). But these advantages are gained at a cost. Instead of examining the participants' deployment of categories within their interactions, it uses pre-designed categories prior to data analysis. This seems to tie it back inexorably to the theoretical approach of quantitative research, following the latter's dependence upon operational definitions at the beginning stage of a piece of research (see Chapter 2).

So the theoretical basis of qualitative content analysis is at best unclear and this means that, unfortunately, its conclusions can often seem trite. As Atkinson points out, one of the disadvantages of the coding schemes used in such enterprises as content analysis is that, because they are based upon a given set of categories, they furnish 'a powerful conceptual grid' (Atkinson, 1992: 459) from which it is difficult to escape. While this 'grid' is very helpful in organising the data analysis, it also deflects attention away from uncategorised activities (see my discussion of fieldnotes in Section 5.2.6).

In part, Atkinson's critique vitiates the claims of many quantitative researchers who attempt to produce reliable evidence about a large sample of texts. The most

of the problem with content analysis (and its relatives) is not simply Atkinson's point about overlooked categories but how analysts usually simply trade off their tacit everyday knowledge in coining and applying whatever categories they do use.

EXERCISE 3.2

Look at the letters page of any newspaper (select one topic about which there are at least two letters) or at today's comments on any Internet chatroom. Now:

- Identify the main categories that are used.
- Count the frequency with which these categories are used.
- Consider what conclusions you can draw from your findings.

3.3 GROUNDED THEORY

As we have seen, one of the problems with content analysis is that it appears to fit most neatly into a quantitative version of how to analyse data. By contrast, grounded theory is firmly rooted in an assumption common to qualitative researchers: do not begin with a prior hypothesis but induce your hypotheses from close data analysis. As Charmaz and Bryant put it: 'Grounded theory is a method of qualitative inquiry in which researchers develop inductive theoretical analyses from their collected data and subsequently gather further data to check these analyses. The purpose of grounded theory is theory construction, rather than description or application of existing theories' (2011: 292).

This leads to a number of practical questions:

- In the midst of a field setting, how do you go about codifying your observations?
- How can you develop hypotheses from your observations?
- How can you go on to build a theory?

CASE STUDY

Glaser and Strauss's (1967) famous account of grounded theory sought to provide answers to such questions and, by doing so, has become by far the most influential approach to methodology in qualitative work. The approach emerged after the authors' study of dying on a hospital ward (Glaser and Strauss, 1968). This revealed the different contexts in which terminal patients became aware of their fate. As Glaser and Strauss recognised, such 'awareness contexts' must be a more general phenomenon which extend beyond hospital wards and into a range of settings (from schools, universities to prisons) where people learn what is expected of them.

In the rest of this section, I examine three crucial aspects of grounded theory:

- coding through memo-writing
- theoretical **sampling**
- generating **theories** grounded in your data.

3.3.1 Coding through memo-writing

Doing grounded theory involves close inspection of data leading to memos using tentative codes which may form the basis of a later theory. As Charmaz puts it:

> As grounded theorists, we study our early data and begin to separate, sort, and synthesize them through qualitative coding. Coding means that we attach labels to bits of data to distil it and give us a handle for comparing data. Our nascent ideas point to areas to explore during subsequent data-collecting. (2006: 3)

What are the practicalities of coding?

- You can highlight a word, line, sentence or paragraph and then give it a label.
- Your labels can range from the quite descriptive to the abstract and conceptual.
- You can pick out single 'key words' that do some nice summing up, or can select a few words, phrases or even sentences.
- These labels can emerge from using the specific words that people use, as well as modifying, somewhat, those phrases. This is often referred to as '*in vivo* coding' and is used at any early stage of analysis. (adapted from Rapley, 2011: 282)

The following case study is an example of how Kathy Charmaz started to code an interview with Bessie, a handicapped woman in a wheelchair.

CASE STUDY
Bessie and her Daughter

Bessie sat bent over in her wheelchair at the kitchen table and tells me of her rapid descent into life-threatening illness. When she began her tale of her risky surgery, her middle-aged daughter, Thelma, who had been tidying kitchen counters in the adjoining room, stops and joins us. Bessie tells of her near-death experience when her heart stopped. Thelma listened with rapt attention and awe. Though she had heard the tale many times before, it transformed the moment anew. Bessie told of being in the long dark tunnel, then seeing a beautiful bright light. Bessie believed that the light emanated from the face of God. As Thelma heard her mother's tale again, she gazed upon her with reverence. Afterwards, Thelma emphasized how this event had lifted Bessie's spirits and improved her attitude toward her illness. (Charmaz, 2006: 74)

Kathy reflected upon what she had heard and seen during her interview with Bessie. Afterwards, she wrote a memo in which she picked out the categories used by Bessie and her daughter and started to build a grounded theory from them.

WRITING A MEMO

Suffering as a Moral Status

Suffering is a profoundly moral status as well as a physical experience. Stories of suffering reflect and redefine that moral status.

With suffering come **moral rights** and **entitlements** as well as **moral definitions – when suffering is deemed legitimate.** Thus, the person can make certain moral claims **and** have certain moral judgments conferred upon him or her.

- Deserving
- Dependent
- In need

Suffering can bring a person an elevated moral status. Here, suffering takes on a sacred status. This is a person who has been in sacred places, who has seen known what ordinary people have not. Their stories are greeted with awe and wonder. The self also has elevated status. This person is special; the compelling story casts an aura of compelling qualities on the storyteller. This is a person who has been in sacred places, who has seen and known what ordinary people have not. Their stories are greeted with awe and wonder. (Charmaz, 2006: 73–4)

Writing memos like this involves walking a particular kind of tightrope. At one extreme, you could simply list the categories used by the participant ('*in vivo*' coding). While this might be useful at an early stage, if you do nothing else, then it will start to look like mere content analysis and any link to theory generation will be uncertain.

Tim Rapley offers some wise words of advice about this:

> Despite repeated warnings in the literature to retain 'the participant's voice', when it comes to the words you choose for your labels you really don't have to take this too far. Don't feel that you need to stick to exactly the phrase used, that to modify it, say by changing the tense or taking out an utterance, you are somehow being disrespectful to that person's 'lived experience'. This can lose the point of good analysis and can cause confusion. First, you need to remember that creating a list of key verbatim descriptions is not the end stage of analysis, it is the start. Second, it confuses the analytic phase with the phase of presentation of your argument to others. In notes to yourself and in publications, you will probably end up using verbatim quotes, and so give others access to these 'voices'. (2011: 282)

By contrast, it is tempting to code in terms of technical concepts drawn from your discipline. However, if this is done too early, you may lose touch with the fine detail of what you are hearing and seeing. In this case, you tend to exclude the possibility of being surprised by the complexities of your data and the sophistication of participants' skills in doing whatever they are doing. Again, Rapley puts it nicely:

> grouping relatively large chunks of text together, using large theoretical labels like 'power' or 'identity work' is rarely a good way to start. Such grand, off-the-shelf, labels are clearly the mainstay of a lot of academic writing and discussion, and such issues may be present, shaping, or clearly visible in your data. However, this can easily close down the analysis far too quickly, in the sense that you've already decided that the specific focus is on issues such as this, and that these are the key examples that inform you about its properties or essential make-up. As such it can overly-determine the shape and possibilities of your data. Such broad concepts are actually the end-point of a careful process of analytic work. By starting with and only working with such theory driven macro-labels, you often fail to grasp the specifics of the phenomena. The point is to try to make sense of how, when and why specific processes, practices, and structures happen. (2011: 282).

So did Charmaz introduce the concept of 'moral status' too early into her analysis? Here is her response to Rapley's implied criticism of using labels too eagerly:

> As Rapley might have put it, there are numerous off the shelf analyses of stigma in medical sociology and disabilities studies. Like his example of using 'identity work,' I long thought stigma too general, too easy, to paste the concept of stigma on data and call it an analysis. The memo that I wrote on suffering as a moral status was only partly based on the interview with Bessie. More of my earliest framing of it consisted of an analysis of an interview with Christine Danforth. I didn't pick out categories used by Bessie but did try to interpret and conceptualize what she said. For many years before the specific interview with Christine Danforth, I had many codes about interviewees' descriptions of being devalued and stories and codes about loss. It was apparent that the stories spoke to interviewees' accounts of feeling diminished, but it was while doing line-by-line coding of this particular interview with Christine (I had interviewed her three or four times before) that I came up with the code of 'suffering as a moral status,' and begin to trace out its implications. The interview with Bessie provided more comparative data for the code and for my larger category of a 'hierarchy of moral status in suffering.' (K. Charmaz, personal correspondence)

3.3.2 Theoretical sampling

A defining strategy of grounded theory is theoretical sampling. In quantitative research, we sample in order to achieve numbers that appropriately represent various demographic characteristics of the population (e.g. gender, age, health

status). By contrast, in grounded theory, we use theoretical sampling in order to flesh out the properties of a tentative category. As Charmaz and Bryant put it:

> Theoretical sampling involves gathering new data to check hunches and to confirm that the properties of the grounded theorist's theoretical category are filled out. Researchers may also use it to define variation in a studied process or phenomenon or to establish the boundaries of a theoretical category. When these properties are saturated with data, the grounded theorist ends data collection and integrates the analysis. (2011: 292)

Returning to Charmaz's memo about Bess and her daughter, we can ask questions which provide answers about how theoretical sampling might develop Charmaz's categories. For instance:

- If suffering is viewed as a moral status, in what other settings might 'suffering' be displayed? This suggests sampling, say, pain clinics, daytime television talk shows or popular autobiographies.
- How can we use lateral thinking to develop the concepts of 'suffering' and 'morality'? As Charmaz points out (2006: 76), she attempted to move on from her memos describing Bessie's and Thelma's accounts to build a grounded theory based on Erving Goffman's ideas about how we present ourselves and Emile Durkheim's older account of the place of the 'sacred' and 'profane' in the moral order. Using Goffman, we might theoretically sample from among the many situations in which people present versions of who they are, for example job selection interviews. Using Durkheim, we might look at settings where 'sacredness' was made an issue, for example not just religious sermons but also political speeches as politicians define the limits of the acceptable.

3.3.3 Developing grounded theories

Theoretical sampling helps develop grounded theories based on situations and concepts which are progressively widened by:

- including social situations very different from those with which one began
- linking concepts to broader theories.

This reflects two key features of the grounded theory approach:

- the constant comparative method as the analyst seeks out settings which may modify or broaden their initial categories
- a continual movement between data, memos and theory so that data analysis is theoretically based and theory is grounded in data.

As Charmaz and Bryant put it:

> Grounded theorists engage in data collection and analysis simultaneously in an iterative process that uses comparative methods. They compare data with data, data with codes, codes with codes, codes with tentative categories, and categories with categories. This method fosters analyzing actions and processes rather than themes and topics. Grounded theorists code their data for actions and study how these actions might contribute to fundamental processes occurring in the research site or in the research participants' lives. Through comparing data with codes and codes with codes, grounded theorists can decide which codes to treat and test as tentative theoretical categories. (2011: 292)

The constant movement between data, coding and theory can be quite daunting to the apprentice researcher. The simplified model in Table 3.3 breaks down the process into a number of easy-to-understand steps.

TABLE 3.3 The stages of building grounded theory

1 *Initial coding and memo writing* (line-by-line coding, compare new codes with old, evaluate, alter, adjust, write notes)
2 *Focused coding and memo writing* (select and then code key issues, keep comparing, write notes to refine ideas)
3 *Collect new data via theoretical sampling* (strategically sample to further develop categories and their properties)
4 *Continue to code, memo and theoretical sampling* (develop and refine categories until no new issues emerge)
5 *Sort and integrate memos* (refine links between categories, develop concepts, write a initial draft of a theory) (Rapley, 2011: 274–5)

How does this back and forth movement between data and theory ever end? When should you stop gathering data or developing theories from it? The answer to these questions is suggested by the grounded theory concept of **theoretical saturation**. When fresh data or new settings no longer produce new insights, your research circle is finally closed. As Charmaz puts it:

> Categories are saturated when gathering fresh data no longer sparks fresh theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of your core theoretical categories. (2006: 113)

As we have seen, Glaser and Strauss use their research on death and dying as an example. They show how they developed the category of 'awareness contexts' to refer to the kinds of situations in which people were informed of their likely fate. They call this a grounded **substantive theory**. The category was then saturated and finally related to non-medical settings where people learn about how others define them (e.g. schools). This is now called a grounded **formal theory**.

TIP

Theoretical Saturation

Boredom can be your friend ... you are seeing the same issues again and again and certain labels seem to be emerging as dominant. Discovering repetition can be a good thing. Qualitative research is in part about finding and describing patterns and structures, observing routines. When you've seen the same thing, again and again, you may be onto something. In the early stages of analysis, seeing repetition can be useful. However, in these early stages, it can also mean that your labels are just too large, that you are not thinking with your data at an adequate level of detail. In the later stages, when you're trying to verify your ideas, being bored can be quite useful as it may signify that you've potentially hit gold. (Rapley, 2011: 284–5)

3.3.4 Summary

A simplified model of the grounded theory approach is set out in Table 3.4.

TABLE 3.4 Grounded theory models

1 Try to generate theories through data rather than through prior hypotheses
2 Instead of identifying a single site at the outset, use a process of 'theoretical sampling' of successive sites and sources, selected to test or to refine new ideas as they emerge from the data (as in the refocusing of my hospital research from a single clinic to a comparison of private and NHS clinics, see Section 5.3)
3 Start by coding data line by line to show action and process
4 Raise significant codes into analytic categories for purposes of comparison
5 Check and fill out categories through theoretical sampling and integrate categories into a theoretical framework
6 Stop data collection when categories reach 'theoretical saturation', for example when a 'core category' emerges around which the researcher can integrate the analysis
7 Develop these categories into more general analytic frameworks with relevance outside the setting ('formal theories')

Source: adapted from Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 61, 96, 116; Dey, 2004: 80–1; Charmaz and Mitchell, 2001: 162

3.3.5 Conclusion

At its best, grounded theory offers an approximation of the creative activity of theory-building found in good qualitative work, compared with the dire abstracted empiricism present in the most wooden statistical studies. Grounded theory has been criticised for its failure to acknowledge implicit theories which guide work at an early stage. It also is clearer about the generation of theories than about their

test. Used unintelligently, it can degenerate into simplistic interview research based on a fairly empty building of categories (aided by some computer programs) or into a mere smokescreen used to legitimise purely empiricist research (see Bryman, 1988: 83–7; Silverman, 2010: 297–302).

One way to save 'grounded theory' from being a trite and mistaken technique is to treat it as a way of building theories from a particular **model** of social reality. As Charmaz (2006) has pointed out, a **constructionist** will use grounded theory in a very different way to those ethnographers who believe that their categories simply reproduce nature. In Charmaz's terms: a 'constructivist would emphasize eliciting the participant's definitions of terms, situations, and events and try to tap his or her assumptions, implicit meanings, and tacit rules. An objectivist would be concerned with obtaining information about chronology, events, settings, and behaviors' (2006: 32).

While Charmaz's point about how models shape analysis is welcome, her version of constructionism focuses only on people's *perceptions* of reality. This suits her emphasis on analysing interview data which, as she comments, fit 'grounded theory methods particularly well' (2006: 28). Whether grounded theory can adequately cope with the analysis of **naturally occurring data** remains unclear (for a recent exception based on a study of children's use of school rules, see Thornberg, 2008). A useful start would be to abandon Charmaz's assumption about which topics fit within the 'objectivist' realm and allow constructionists to study what she calls 'chronology, events, settings and behaviour' (see Gubrium, 2010).

LINKS

www.groundedtheory.com/

http://sbs.ucsf.edu/medsoc/anselmstrauss

EXERCISE 3.3

This is part of the life story of a Finnish man attending an alcohol clinic:

> When I was a child, the discipline was very strict. I still remember when my younger brother broke a sugar cup and I was spanked. When my father died, my mother remarried. The new husband did not accept my youngest brother. When I was in the army, my wife was unfaithful to me. After leaving the army, I didn't come home for two days. I started to drink. And I began to use other women sexually. I drank and I brawled, because I was pissed off and because her treacherousness was in my mind.

When I came to the alcohol clinic, it made me think. I abstained for a year. There was some progress but also bad times. I grew up somewhat. When the therapist changed, I was pissed off and gave it all up.

Source: adapted from Alasuutari, 1990

Following what you have read about grounded theory:

- Code the terms which this person tells his story.
- Try to turn your codes into categories.
- What other situations might you sample in order to build a grounded theory (about what?)?

3.4 NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

We have just seen how Kathy Charmaz sought to develop a theory by beginning from the way Bess, a disabled woman, described her situation. Bess's account was in the form of a story. NA offers a way to describe the structures of stories. Like grounded theory, many of these stories are elicited by interviews (see my discussion below of Catherine Riessman's demonstration of how stories work).

For narrative analysis (NA), Charmaz's version of grounded theory analysis of interview data is deficient in three ways:

1 Although Charmaz acknowledges the importance of pauses and overlaps in the interview, her analysis pays little attention either to such features of talk or to how interviewees' comments are tied to the utterances of the interviewer.
2 What interviewees say tends to be treated as offering a more or less transparent picture of their internal meanings. This ignores the way in which talk performs a range of *actions* which can be comprehended without reference to speakers' inner states [see Chapter 9].
3 In her pursuit of categories which can build formal theories, Charmaz may lose some of the fine details of particular cases. If GT [Grounded Theory] is category-based, NA is case-based. (Riessman, 2009: 391–2)

If you think about it, however, we do not necessarily need to interview people in order to discover stories. Thomas and Znaniecki's (1927 [1918–20]) study of the immigration experience of Polish Americans in Chicago, titled *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, is largely based on letters that the authors collected from Polish family members written to each other between Europe and America.

The authors show how the letter writers' identities are displayed as they reflect on who they were in Europe and what they have become in the New World. Like Charmaz, this kind of NA uses a constructionist approach to demonstrate how we actively construct a version of who we are.

The Polish Peasant was based on letters. Around the same time, V.I. Propp was using published stories, another kind of naturally occurring document, to show how we can analyse the structure of folktales.

Propp argues that the fairy tale establishes a narrative form which is central to all story-telling. The fairy tale is structured not by the nature of the characters that appear in it, but by the function they play in the plot. Despite its great detail and many characters, Propp suggests that 'the number of functions is extremely small' (1968: 20). This allows him to attend to a structuralist distinction between appearances (massive detail and complexity) and reality (a simple underlying structure repeated in different ways).

Propp suggests that fairy tales in many cultures share similar themes, for example 'a dragon kidnaps the king's daughter'. These themes can be broken into four elements, each of which can be replaced without altering the basic structure of the story. This is because each element has a certain function. This is shown in Table 3.5.

TABLE 3.5 'A dragon kidnaps the king's daughter'

Element	Function	Replacement
Dragon	Evil force	Witch
King	Ruler	Chief
Daughter	Loved one	Wife
Kidnap	Disappearance	Vanish

Source: adapted from Culler, 1976: 207–8

Following this example, we could rewrite 'A dragon kidnaps the king's daughter' as 'A witch makes the chief's wife vanish', while retaining the same function of each element. Thus a function can be taken by many different roles. This is because the function of a role arises in its significance for the structure of the tale as a whole.

Using a group of 100 tales, Propp isolates 31 'functions' (actions like 'prohibition', 'violation', or, as we have seen above, 'disappearance'). These functions are played out in seven 'spheres of action': the villain, the provider, the helper, the princess and her father, the despatcher, the hero and the false hero.

Functions and 'spheres of action' constitute an ordered set. Their presence or absence in any particular tale allows their plots to be classified. Thus plots take four forms:

1 Development through struggle and victory
2 Development through the accomplishment of a difficult task
3 Development through both 1 and 2
4 Development through neither.

Thus, although any one character may be involved in any sphere of action, and several characters may be involved in the same sphere, we are dealing with a finite sequence:

> the important thing is to notice the number of spheres of action occurring in the fairytale is infinite: we are dealing with discernible and repeated structures. (Hawkes, 1977: 69)

Writing in 1966, Greimas agrees with Propp about the need to locate narrative form in a finite number of elements disposed in a finite number of ways. However, he modifies Propp's list of each elements (Greimas, 1966). This is set out below.

1 Propp's list of seven spheres of action can be reduced into three sets of structural relations: subject versus object (this assumes 'hero' and 'princess' or 'sought-for person'); sender versus receiver (includes 'father' and 'dispatcher'); And helper versus opponent (includes 'donor', 'helper' and 'villain'). This reveals the simple structure of many love stories, that is involving relations between both subject and objects and receivers and senders.
2 Propp's 31 functions may be considerably reduced if one examines how they combine together. For instance, although Propp separates 'prohibition' and 'violation', Greimas shows that a 'violation' presumes a 'prohibition'. Hence they may be combined in one function: 'prohibition versus violation'. Hawkes points out that this allows Greimas to isolate several distinctive structures of the folk narrative. These include:

- contractual structures (relating to establishing and breaking contracts)
- performative structures (involving trials and struggles)
- disjunctive structures (involving movement, leaving, arriving, etc.).

EXERCISE 3.4

Return to the interview with the Finnish man in Exercise 3.2.

- Using what you have read about Propp and Greimas, identify the following elements in this story:

  a Functions (e.g. 'prohibition' or 'violation')
  b Spheres of action (e.g. the villain, the provider, the helper, the princess and her father, the dispatcher, the hero and the false hero).

c Structures (e.g. subject versus object (this includes 'hero' and 'princess' or 'sought-for person'); sender versus receiver (includes 'father' and 'dispatcher'); and helper versus opponent (includes 'donor', 'helper' and 'villain').

- What can be said about the sequence of actions reported?
- Having done this analysis, what features would you look for in other life stories?

This summarised presentation of the work of Propp and Greimas has underlined two useful arguments. First, the structuralist method reminds us that 'meaning never resides in a single term' (Culler, 1976) and consequently that understanding the articulation of elements is our primary task. Second, more specifically, it shows some aspects of how narrative structure works.

When one reflects how much of qualitative data (interviews, documents, conversations) takes a narrative form, as indeed do research reports themselves, then the analysis of the fairy tale stops to look like an odd literary pursuit.

Catherine Riessman further develops the approach by analysing stories not only for the way plots depict social life, but for how distinctive themes and the internal shape of accounts construct experience. Her book *Divorce Talk* (1990) shows how 'women and men make sense of personal relationships', in this case divorce, through story-telling. As the back cover of the book points out:

> To explain divorce, women and men construct gendered visions of what marriage should provide, and at the same time they mourn gender divisions and blame their divorces on them. Riessman examines the stories people tell about their marriages – the protagonists, inciting conditions, and culminating events – and how these narrative structures provide ways to persuade both teller and listener that divorce was justified.

As Gubrium and Holstein note:

> the reference to 'narrative structures' echoes Propp's pioneering functional analysis of Russian folk tales … Whether it is the function of a witch or a dragon, the true-to-life representation of a social world, or the construction of a form of experience by those differentially positioned in it, the internal features of stories have generalizable characteristics that move us beyond the idiosyncrasies of individual accounts. Fairy tales and reports of neighborhood experience have discernable narrative contours, in other words, suggesting that narrativity can be examined on its own terms for the manner it shapes what is known about its subject matter. (2008: 245).

The following case study from a medical encounter demonstrates the kind of features which Riessman's focus on narrative can reveal. However, it should be

emphasised that this excerpt is not from Riessman's own data, but from a corpus of medical interviews collected and analysed by Clark and Mishler (1992).

CASE STUDY
Using Narrative Analysis

A middle-aged African-American man with a seizure disorder comes to a scheduled appointment with a primary care physician, a third year male resident in an outpatient clinic of a large public teaching hospital in the northeastern US. In the conversation the patient and doctor each try to make coherent sense of a recent seizure. The physician's pause during his opening question ("Okay so you said you ha: d a-seizure.....yesterday?", line 1), which he follows with "Hmm" (2), a long pause and then another question: "At work?" (5). This opening invites the story. The patient then begins with an abstract – he is not "really worried" because it is another instance of "gettin upset and aggravated" (9–10) – a precipitant apparently leading to seizures that the parties share. The patient then develops a detailed account of a challenging brake job on an Audi that required several days to complete – "you get right up on the caliper." (21–2) He hit his eye on the caliper, got a black eye and headache, his boss failed to secure the necessary parts and the next day he had to move onto a second car. The repeated frustrations ("It never took me that long before to finish up a brake job", 32–3) led to aggravation to the point of having a seizure (Riessman, 2011: 318–18).

1R: Okay so you said you ha: d a-seizure yesterday?
2[pause]
3P: Uh u yesterday yesterday about
4 about eleven o'clock yeah
5R: Hmm. . At work?
6P: (h)um hum
7R: Okay, uh
8 [pause]
9P: Well I'm not really worried itz same thing you told me not gettin
10ya-know not upset and aggravated and . I couldn't have-ta uhm my
11[pause]
12?: hh.hh
13boss give me a car Tuesday right? . . . and I workin-on it was an
14Audi I never did brakes on an Audi before, ya-know front wheel drive?
15[pause]
16/?: hh.hh
17R: Yeah
18P: And it was a problem, ya-know and I was down all day long you know
19w – back like this-here. Like the car's on a lift,
20R: Yeah
21P: But it's two bolts ya-know ya just can't get to-em unless you get right up

(Continued)

(Continued)

22on the caliper and ah twis- jus can twist a little bit with a
23screwdriver. And I was going like (gangbust) when (it) ya see I got a
24black e(h)ye .hhuh
25R: (O-)Oh from the "seizure
26P: No. From the caliper. One of em fell, to the eye
27?: Oh I see
28[pause]
29P: And it hit me there so Tuesday night and I had this terrible
30headache and all. So I slept with a ya-know with a ice pack
31over-it all night to keep- tryin to keep it from swelling and all.
32. . And then I went back in yesterday to try to finish it up. It
33never took me that long before to finish up a brake job
34R: .hhhh.
35P: And my boss hadn't got all the parts for it so I start working
36on another car-ya-know? That's when I ended up having the seizure.
37R: Okay uhm .hh so: did your boss or someone else see the seizure happen

Source: Clark and Mishler, 1992: 349, as cited by Riessman, 2011 (I have simplified the transcription and added line numbers)

Here are Riessman's observations on how this narrative is constructed between the doctor and patient:

- The story is invited and interactionally built, becoming a situated interactional accomplishment. The physician's long pauses cede the floor to the patient, creating the space to narrate. The patient then takes up the active role, developing a plot sequence embedded in his life world as an auto mechanic. (Riessman, 2011: 317)
- The conversation allows the patient [to] make an identity claim, developing the theme of his personal responsibility. More than merely a report of a seizure, the patient can position himself in a story as the diligent and responsible worker who was frustrated in his attempt to meet a challenge at work. His experience becomes the center of attention; the story functions, as personal stories often do, to make an explanatory argument and presentation of 'self.' He can construct a positive identity in the face of what might have been a stigmatizing illness episode on the job. He can ward off the stigma of epilepsy and any possible blame for precipitating the seizure by his behavior.
- For the physician, the story provides something different: the historically connected facts needed to evaluate a clinical problem in a way that takes account of the life world of the patient.
- Shaped by the constraints of the medical setting, the story is recipient-designed; it provides the detail and specificity needed to make clinical sense of a problem. (Riessman, 2011: 318)

This case study shows how, in answering someone's questions about something that happened to us, we construct a version of ourselves full of moral claims. Moreover, such questions are always situated in some social context – from everyday conversation to some institutional setting (here a doctor–patient interview).

There appear to be similarities with Charmaz's account of Bessie and her daughter. Both are concerned with how people present their identities and both use a constructionist model.

Yet Riessman claims that there are differences between narrative analysis (NA) and constructionist grounded theory (GT). In particular:

- GT is primarily concerned with perception and focuses on how 'meaning' is constructed in talk. By contrast, NA is concerned with action and examines the activities that are performed when people talk with one another.
- GT wants to move beyond particular cases to make broader generalisations about social processes. By contrast, NA seeks to preserve and interrogate particular instances. In GT terms, NA does not aim to construct formal theories which move beyond particular cases. As Charmaz puts it: 'narrative analyses emphasize stories and their structure, grounded theory emphasizes processes and actions. Grounded theorists use stories in service of analyzing processes' (C. Riessman, personal correspondence).
- NA is more concerned than GT with the local context of a narrative. So, in the case study just cited, it is important to understand the way in which the patient and doctor shape their remarks to the context of a medical setting.
- In research interviews all the speakers (participant, listener/questioner) shape the interaction to suit the setting and their perceptions of the evolving research relationship.
- NA examines how stories make use of cultural discourses and accounting practices. This is illustrated in the following case study.

CASE STUDY
A Turn to Narrative Practice

As plentiful and detailed as stories might be, they are always more than accounts; they are accounts that have been conveyed and stand to be reconveyed in concrete circumstances. Stories are constructed with an audience in view and, for that reason, are eventful. Their eventfulness draws attention to the actual, not just the reported, sites of their social lives .... Organizational researchers, from those in management studies to those in organizational sociology, have seen the analytic importance of turning narrative inquiry to the sites of narrative practice (Boje, 1991; Czarniawska, 1997; Gabriel, 2000). Sites of narrative practice are not confined to the formally established, like schools and businesses, but now extend to sites in transition or under construction, such as storytelling in times of social crises or in political protests ... In fact, it's the business of some organizations to offer guidelines, if not directives, for fashioning one's story in a particular way. The question of narrative ownership is pertinent here and is hardly just a matter of personal property. In practice, ownership extends to the myriad and diverse sources of narrative construction. In a complex world of stories, it is useful to imagine that the little stories we hear day-in and day-out relate to bigger stories, some of which may be *the* big story of the experience in view, bringing on board issues of discourse, power, influence, and globalization. (Gubrium, 2010: 390–1)

3.4.1 Summary

I conclude my discussion of NA by summarising some key questions it suggests we ask about **narratives**:

- In what kind of a story does a narrator place herself?
- How does she position herself to the audience, and vice versa?
- How does she position characters in relation to one another, and in relation to herself?
- How does she position herself to herself, that is, make identity claims? (Bamberg, 1997, quoted by Riessman, 2011)

Riessman offers a number of suggestions about how we should answer these questions and I have set these out in Table 3.6.

TABLE 3.6 Working with narrative analysis

- adopt a constructionist framework and be precise in your use of an appropriate narrative vocabulary
- in analyzing particular narrative segments, think about form and function – the way a segment of data is organized and why
- don't neglect the local context in your analysis, including the questioner/listener, setting, and position of an utterance in the broader stream of the conversation

Source: adapted from Riessman, 2011: 328–9

TIP

If you want to do NA, the following questions are useful to ask (see Cortazzi, 2001, and also Riessman, 1993):

- What is the content of the story you are examining?
- Who are the principal agents?
- How is the story told (structure and sequence)?
- What purposes does the story serve (functions)?
- In what place or setting is the story told (context)?
- Does the story have a clear culmination with a moral, as in a fairy tale, or does it follow a different pattern (issues of genre)?

LINK

Summary and review of Catherine Kohler Riessman (2008) *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*, R. Lyle Duque (2010), 'Forum: Qualitative Social Research':

www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1418

EXERCISE 3.5

Return again to the interview with the Finnish man in Exercise 3.2 and answer these questions:

- In what kind of a story does the narrator place himself?
- How does he position himself to the audience, and vice versa?
- How does he position characters in relation to one another, and in relation to himself?
- How does he position himself to himself, that is, make identity claims? (Bamberg, 1997, quoted by Riessman, 2011)

3.5 CONCLUSION

I appreciate that my presentation of three different ways of doing data analysis may have been difficult to digest if you are new to the field. But do not worry if you did not follow every nuance of each approach. You will only fully understand these three approaches (and the others which follow in later chapters) when you try them out yourselves on some data.

My main concern has been to give you a taste of how we can rigorously analyse data. And, as I tried to show at the start of this chapter, *all* effective ways of working have much in common.

Tim Rapley has offered some wise advice about what this involves and his suggestions are reproduced in Table 3.7.

TABLE 3.7 Good practice in qualitative data analysis

- *Always start by engaging in some kind of close, detailed, reading of a sample/section/bit of your archive of data:*
  - Close, detailed, reading means looking for key, essential, striking, odd, interesting things people or texts say or do as well as repetition
  - You should make notes, jottings, markings etcetera, either on the pages or somewhere else
  - Always distinguish participants' categories [emic] from your own categories [etic]
- *Always read and systematically label your archive of data:*
  - Label key, essential, striking, odd, interesting things
  - Label similar items with the same label
  - These labels can be drawn from ideas emerging from your close, detailed, reading of your data archive, as well as from your prior reading of empirical and theoretical works
  - With each new application of a label, review your prior labelling practices and see if what you want to label fits what has gone before. If yes, use that label. If no, create a new one. If it fits somewhat, you may want to modify your understanding of that label to include this

(Continued)

TABLE 3.7 (Continued)

- *Always reflect on why you've done what you've done:*
  - Come up with a document that lists your labels. It might be useful to give some key examples, to write a sentence or two that explains what you are try to get at, what sort of things should go together under specific labels
- *Always review and refine your labels and labelling practices:*
  - For each label, collect together all the data you've given that label to. Ask yourself whether the data and ideas collected under this label is coherent, ask yourself what are the key properties and dimensions of all the data collected under that label
  - Try to combine your initial labels, look for links between them, look for repetitions, exceptions and try to reduce them to key ones. This will often mean shifting from more verbatim, descriptive, labels to more conceptual, abstract and analytic labels
  - Keep evaluating, adjusting, altering and modifying your labels and labelling practices
  - Go back over what you've already done and re-label it with your new schema or ideas
- *Always focus on what you feel are the key labels and the relationship between them:*
  - Make some judgments about what you feel are the central labels and focus on them
  - Try to look for links, patterns, associations, arrangements, relationships, sequences etcetera

Source: adapted from Rapley, 2011: 277–8

One final word: just as you will only really understand any approach by trying it out yourself, so you will only start to do qualitative analysis when you start to write it up in your own words. You may think you have made great mental leaps but data analysis can only take off when you commit yourself to print (see Chapter 12).

TIP

Qualitative data analysis can seem very complex. Here are some ideas which simplify matters:

- The constant comparative method is a feature of all good research and comparison can be made between the elements in a single case. Therefore, you do not necessarily need data from more than one setting
- Constructionist qualitative researchers reject the assumption that there is some total picture of any phenomenon which can be obtained by multiple data sets and multiple methods. Since, according to this view, there are only **hyphenated phenomena**, just make what you can of what you have.
- It follows that the navigational logic of **triangulation** (where you compare different readings to get at the truth) does not apply. Rather than, say, comparing interviewees' responses with their actions, look at one aspect or the other and marvel at what they achieve.

KEY POINTS

- Get down to analysis as early as possible and avoid 'busy' work.
- Try out different theoretical approaches; see what works for you (and for your data).
- The theoretical basis of qualitative content analysis is at best unclear and this means that, unfortunately, its conclusions can often seem trite.
- Grounded theory involves coding through memo-writing, theoretical sampling and generating theories grounded in your data,
- Narrative analysis usually adopts a constructionist framework and uses an appropriate narrative vocabulary; consider the way a segment of data is organised (and why) and examine the local context in which the data arise.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1 Why is it usually important to avoid formulating an early hypothesis?
2 What considerations arise in deciding how much data to transcribe before you begin analysis?
3 What is meant by 'telling examples' and why should you generally avoid them in writing up your research?
4 What is meant by 'content analysis'? What are its advantages and limitations?
5 What is meant by 'grounded theory'? What are its advantages and limitations?
6 What is meant by 'narrative analysis'? What are its advantages and limitations?
7 What does Rapley mean by 'close, detailed reading' of data?

RECOMMENDED READING

This chapter draws heavily on the chapters by Kathy Charmaz (on grounded theory), Catherine Riessman (on narrative analysis) and Tim Rapley (on doing qualitative data analysis) in my edited collection *Qualitative Research* (Third Edition, 2011). I strongly recommend reading these chapters. You might also look at Charmaz's *Constructing Grounded Theory* (2006) and Riessman's *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences* (2008). Gubrium and Holstein's *Analyzing Narrative Reality* (2009) offers an approach to analysing actively constructed narratives, including

(Continued)

(Continued)

those produced by interviewing. Gubrium's 'A turn to narrative practice' (2010) is a marvellous brief introduction to how narrative analysis can go beyond the contents of stories to analyse the resources and contexts upon which story-tellers draw.

I discuss qualitative analysis for PhD students in my book *Doing Qualitative Research* (2010). I consider further the importance of looking at sequences in data in my *A Very Short, Fairly Interesting, Reasonably Cheap Book about Qualitative Research* (2007).